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# JOAN.

## *PART I.*

### CHAPTER I.

"And ye shall walk in silk attire,
And siller hae to spare!"

WOLFERSTAN is humming this very softly to himself, half under his breath, half over. A girl at the house he is staying at sang it last night, and it runs in his head yet; a girl whose music-leaves he turned, whose music-stool he screwed up, and three of whose fingers he succeeded in squeezing when he gave her her candle at bedtime. Wolferstan has not got it on his conscience that he ever in all his life missed an opportunity of squeezing a woman's hand.

"And siller hae to spare!"

"Ah! that is just what I am afraid she will not have, poor soul!"

It is not the girl whose fingers he squeezed of whom he is thinking, but another. It is Easter-day, in the afternoon. Wolferstan is sitting on an old tree-trunk that once was a stout oak-tree, but through whose dry old veins not even this strong young spring, vigorously awakening, can send the green sap-blood racing. Before Wolferstan's eyes spread the ups and downs, the dead fern and live deer; the mighty single trees roomily stretching great arms on all sides of them into the free and wholesome air, and the bosky coppices of an English park. In his ears is the austere music of church-bells from different parishes, all seeming to tell with solemn mirth that "Christ is risen." Wolferstan is not going to church. He went this morning, and found her places in the hymn-book (out of which he afterward warbled with her) for the girl with the fingers. He is bound on a much disagreeabler errand now; and so he thinks. He is going to pay a visit of condolence; yes—to condole with a young lady upon the loss of her grandfather.

The death of a grandfather is generally a very supportable affliction. But a small bottle would hold the tears that most people shed for their grandparents. Most of us can kiss that rod. But in the present case grandfather is a wide word. It means father, mother, brother, sister, home, standing, soft lying, high feeding, pretty nearly everything that makes life a morsel to be eaten with slow relish instead of a physic-draught to be quickly swallowed with wry faces. It is difficult to offer comfort to a person who has lost all these at one sweep. So Wolferstan feels. Though he has been sitting on his tree-trunk for a good half-hour, cudgeling such brains as God has given him, nothing that sounds even to himself in the least degree consolatory occurs to him. The only thing that will persistently recur to him—often and angrily as he has driven it away as utterly inadmissible—is the old and homely saw that "it is no use crying over spilt milk." He cannot get rid of it. It comes back like a gnat, and sticks like a bur. Its rude philosophy thrusts itself between him and all suitabler forms of speech.

In despair he jumps up at last, and begins to walk through the quickening, freshening grass toward the great old Hall, with four cold, gray towers ivy-muffled, that stands amid level velvet gardens fronting him. The bells are still ringing. The air is temperately cool; neither balmy nor yet sharp; the sky looks high and chill and palely colored. Heaven seems far off, though it is Easter-day. Last time that he was here it was winter, and the hounds met here. A small, bright rime lay on the grass; flashes of scarlet warmed up the cold and sunless colors of the weather-scarred, gray walls. The old squire was pottering about on his old horse. Well, the old squire is dead now! dead suddenly. He was not among those who fumble and bungle long at the lock which shuts in the great secret. I think that more people than used to do so, go suddenly, nowadays. We have increased the speed of our traveling over this earth, why not also the quickness of our journey from this world into the next? Anyhow, he went quickly; not even in his own house or his own bed! but in a public place, at a public meeting. With one stoop forward of his gray head, with one groaning breath, he went and took the great and unavoidable stride without time for any pain or fear.

Poor old squire! Yes, and that same day on which the hounds met here, Joan stood on the top of the steps in a mouse-colored velvet gown, shading with one hand the laughter of her eyes from the low, cool winter sun, which stared so hard at her. And the sun had good taste: she was worth staring at. He has reached the Hall-door by now; mounted the steps, and rung the bell.

"Nothing is changed!" he says to himself with a sort of irrational surprise, looking back at the park across which he has come, and at a herd of stags that are trooping from one glade to another, with a tossing of great horns and whisking of tiny tails.

But, after all, why should the grass look withered, and the deer's plump flanks fall in because an old man is dead? It would be much odder if they did. At least the footman who opens the door is changed. He has moulted his gay blue-and-yellow plumage, and now the sable rook is not blacker than he.

As Wolferstan follows him through half a dozen rooms, big and little, he looks round him affectionately. One always feels rather fondly toward a house where one has been happy, and Wolferstan has had many jovial moments in this one. Here stand the statues, just as they did on the night of the theatricals, when Joan made such a sweet widow that he very nearly asked her to run the chance of being his. Here is Psyche, slenderly nude, with her butterfly on her finger. The little serpent is stinging Eurydice's cold white heel, and Hadrian still stands stern in his panoply.

When at last they reach the sitting-room, toward which they finally tend, they find it empty. In it there is neither man nor mouse, nor woman either. The only live thing is a small faint fire that the sun is trying hard to kill, a little fire from whose dull heart a red glow shines reflected in the old Dutch tiles, where Eve's gluttony and Noah's carouse are devoutly, yet grotesquely, wrought in blue and white. Near the hearth is drawn up an arm-chair, which, though it is not at all rucked up or disarranged, as it infallibly would have been had a man occupied it, yet has the indescribable air of having been lately sat in. A book, with its back still warm and warped from having been held over the fire, gapes half open on the table. There are flowers—flowers everywhere! They seem to have walked in through the open door of the neighboring conservatory.

She has not come yet: perhaps she does not mean to come at all. He walks about nervously, saying over to himself his prepared speech, and trying to keep the spilt milk out of it. He strolls into the conservatory, and looks at the great and

fragrant array of flourishing blooms; a regiment of cyclamens, each with its sweet white ears laid back; tulips, the vividness of whose varnished coats makes one wink; an army of cinerarias, each blossom a little scentless sun-disk of blazing color; heavy, bashful roses that set one dreaming of June. Poor, poor Joan! What will she do without her flowers? Poor little Joan!

As he thus kindly and pitifully addresses her, in his own soul, and mentally strokes her, she enters. The tall old door opens, and she comes in with a soft and dragging step. For so slender a thing she treads heavily, does not she? but sorrow puts leaden weights in one's feet. Wolferstan has hardly ever before seen her, that she has not been either quite laughing, or else with unborn or half-born laughter hovering in the corners of her happy eyes. It is not that she has pulled a long face, even now, or is dressed in the mourner's airs, that some people, although truly sorrowing, think it right in such cases to wear.

She comes to meet him with a smile, but alas! it has so clearly been put on only just outside the door, and is kept with such difficulty from brinily drowning itself. She looks half the size that he remembers her when last they parted, not that she ever was of the buxom sort. Hers was never one of your great, luscious Rubens bodies, in whose depths of creamy flesh the poor little soul is oftenest lost and smothered. But now you can almost, as they say, see through her. One is always tenderly disposed toward thin people, though, in reality, they are not nearly such objects of compassion as the preposterously fat, toward whom no one's heart yearns.

Before he in the least knows what he is meaning to do (Wolferstan's actions mostly get ahead of his intentions), he is standing before her, holding both her hands; though the amount of their hitherto acquaintance would not justify more than the moderate shaking of one.

The trite and unconsoling consolations over which he labored so heavily on his tree-trunk depart to the limbo appointed for all abortions, and he finds himself saying hurriedly:

"Do you mind my coming? do I bother you? shall I go?"

"No, don't!" she answers, with a sort of eagerness, giving his hands a little unintentional squeeze of detention; "it is good to see some one! I was so glad when they came and told me; I thought I never was going to see any one again, and I have been alone—alone—such a long time!" Her very voice is changed; it sounds faint, and yet hoarse, as if all its substance and sweetness had been soaked away in tears. "This is a bad house to be alone in, I can tell you," she goes on in the same weak, spent kind of tone, lifting her eyes with a sort of relief to the pity of his face; "you do not know how ghostly the statues look at night; you have only seen the gallery when it has been well lit up; and the suits of armor are worse—oh! far worse! last night I stared at them—I could not help it—until I could have sworn that there was a skeleton head under each visor!"

She speaks the last words so low and so quickly that he finds it hard to hear them.

"Poor soul!" he says, taking both the chill little hands, which are gradually growing warmer in his close clasp, into one of his, in which they lie quite comfortably, and stroking their smooth backs with his freed one; "why did not you send for me?"

"That would have been so likely!" she says, with a little flash of maiden mirth struggling into her drowned eyes; "if I had, you would have thought that grief had unsettled my wits! And not a soul has been near me," she continues presently, raising her voice a little, and speaking with slow emphasis, while her eyes still rest on his full and solemn, and with no more apparent consciousness in them of his being man, and herself woman, than

if he had been the grandfather she deplores. "Not a soul! except the doctor twice; he said both times that I was to keep up, and take a fizzing draught, and not think of anything disagreeable, and remember that everybody died, ha! ha!—and the lawyer once—"

"Yes; and what did he say to you?" interrupts Wolferstan, eagerly.

"He said—but why do you make me tell you? I see by your face that you know! there is not a hedger and ditcher about that does not know—he said: 'My dear young friend' (I never used to be his 'dear young friend!' I used to be 'Miss Dering,'" drawing up her little milk-white throat)—"'my dear young friend, I am sorry that it has devolved upon me to be the bearer of ill-tidings to you, but—'" (turning her head restlessly about like some poor dumb beast in physical pain), "'that I was a beggar in short,' those were not his words, of course; he said it much more lengthily and roundaboutly. I think he kept me on the rack for ten good minutes, but that was what it came to!"

"And was that all? did he tell you—did he say nothing else?" asks the young fellow with quick anxiety.

"*Was that all?*" she repeats with an almost angry emphasis, opening her eyes as widely as they will go; "was not that enough? Good Heavens! what else would you have had him say? what could be worse?"

Wolferstan does not answer aloud, but to his own heart he says, "Thank God!"

"When he first told me," she goes on, as if speech were a relief, "I said I did not care a straw. I did not then; he thought it was bravado, but it was not; now I am beginning to care, dreadfully! it is enough to make any one care, is not it?"

"Merciful God! I should think it was!"

For a moment or two they stand silent, their position unaltered. It does not occur to them to sit down or to loose each other's hands. Sometimes, in trouble, the contact of warm human flesh is more comforting than any spoken words. And the sun comes in merrily, through the open window, and kisses them both, as not knowing which he likes best, and gives one stab more to the sick fire.

## CHAPTER II.

"But how is it," resumes Wolferstan, presently, harking back to her former speech, "that you say no one has been near you? Was not your uncle down here? they told me that he was."

"He came down here for the—the—I need not say it—you know," she answers, shying away with unconquerable repugnance from the grim word; "but he went away next day, and while he was here I did not see him, I would not; he is master here now, you know, and you may say that it was quarreling with my bread-and-butter, but I could not; I staid in my room; he never was at all kind or dutiful to *him*."

At the last words her voice altogether breaks, and, snatching away both her hands from his, she covers all her small and woful face with them. It is perhaps as well; since otherwise he would probably have gone on holding them to the present day.

"You have heard all about it, I suppose?" she says after a pause, sitting listlessly down near the window, and pulling out of her pocket a pocket-handkerchief rather finer than a cobweb, and with an inky border a foot deep, according to our sensible fashion of making even our reluctant noses mourn our dead. "I suppose you saw it in the papers. I read the account of it in them all. I tried to fancy that it had nothing to say to me; there were two other sudden deaths in the *Times* on the same day—a young woman and a little child—I wondered

how many people each of them had to be sorry for them; the worst part of crying," she says, with a slow and dragging accent, "is when one cries *alone*. I was the only person who cried for him."

Wolferstan looks down contritely. There is no earthly reason why he should have wept for old Squire Dering, and yet he would give fifty pounds to be able, truthfully, to tell her that he had shed tears for him. Even though, untruthfully, he would tell her so, only that he knows she would not believe him. He tries to mutter something to the effect that one may be very sorry for a thing without crying about it; but she goes on without paying the slightest heed to his well-meant mumble.

"Do you know," she says, leaning forward, and looking solemnly at him, "that only the evening before—after I had bidden him good-night, and was half-way up-stairs to bed—something *drove* me back to have one other look at him? he was sitting, so" (resting one elbow on a little table near her, and pushing her fingers through her hair and looking as unlike any old man as it is well possible to look), "you know what beautiful white hair he had—mine is coarse in comparison with it—and, young as you are, it was as thick as yours! He asked me why I had come back, and I could not say, I had no reason!"

"Poor soul!"

Wolferstan is aware that he has said this two or three times before, and would be glad to vary it, did he know how, but there are few ejaculations that hit the tepid medium between the very much too warm and the rather too cold.

"The next morning," she goes on, by-and-by, with a long, low, sighing breath, "*the* morning, you understand, I went out to the Hall-door to see him mount his horse, as I always do, always *did*, I mean" (changing the tense with a sort of sob), "and, just as he was riding away, he turned half round and said, 'Go in, my Joan, this wind will cut you in two!' Those were the very last words I ever heard him say! does it not seem odd" (turning with awed, yet puzzled appeal, more fully toward him), "that such a trivial speech should be the very last I should have heard, or ever shall hear now from him?" Then she adds in a lower key, and more as a speculation than a complaint: "Who will care how the wind cuts me now, I wonder? No, don't say that *you* will; it is very kind of you, but it is nonsense! there is no reason why you should!"

Again there is a silence, a longer one. Wolferstan breaks it at last.

"And so you have to turn out of the old house?" he says, pityingly, casting his eyes regretfully round him, looking up at the painted ceiling, where water-gods and sea-nymphs are frolicking, naked and unashamed, in a sapphire sea; and then at the tapestried walls, where gray-faced knights and leaden-colored ladies have been bowing and parading and twanging guitars for the last four hundred years.

"Yes," she answers, her eyes following his; "and if my soul were to have to be torn out of my body, I think it could hardly be with a worse wrench! There is to be a sale, you know," she goes on in a monotonous key of utter spiritlessness; "my uncle hates the place: he is going to sell everything, even the pictures—think of that!—he says that his ancestors may go as cheap as Charles Surface's, for all he cares! if I were not sure" (with a melancholy yet gracious smile) "that you had plenty of your own, I would ask you to buy them!"

"Shall I?" he cries, eagerly; "I will bid for them with pleasure, if you like!" nor does he, in his compassionate readiness to saddle himself with all her forefathers, for one moment reflect on what he will do with the seventy or eighty odd Derings, when he has got them.

But she shakes her head, and says, "I was only joking!" Another pause. "You must not think," begins Joan again, finally drying her poor eyes on the gossa-

mer pocket-handkerchief, which is adapted neither for a great grief nor a cold, "that I mean always to go on moaning and whimpering like this; I suppose it is seeing you that has set me off again; else for three days—nearly four—I have not shed a tear; I hoped I had come to the end of them; there must be some end to one's stock, must not there? and I think" (drawing herself together, as one that nerves himself for a hard struggle) "that I have some little pluck about me somewhere, if I could only come at it."

After an interval:

"Even if I could have had my own choice," she says, with a deep gravity, "I would not always have been prosperous; I do not think that the people who always have things their own way are ever worth much; of course" (shuddering), "I would not have chosen such a trouble as this; but, after all, if one always had smooth sailing, it could never be known—one could never know one's self what sort of stuff one was made of; I have a good chance now of showing what sort of stuff I am made of, have not I?"

He looks at her with a compassion too deep for words. He is always sorry for every woman; merely for being a woman, and for being by this dismal accident debarred from all the sinful and most of the unsinful diversions of this life. His pity is centupled in the case of this frail knight-errant going out so valiantly in her pasteboard armor to battle with the great and ruthless dragon of this bitter world.

"At least," she says, clinching one slight hand, and looking upward, as one that registers a vow, "at least I will not be knocked down by this first blow, like ripe corn by a hail-storm; they have almost explained away God nowadays, have not they?" she says, putting her hand in a sort of bewildered way to her forehead; "so perhaps it is not he, but yet I feel that there is something outside of me—something not me—that will help me if I make a good fight!"

"You do not look as if it would take a very big blow to knock you down," he says, sadly, looking at her with a deep commiseration, that is almost angry in its helplessness. For a moment he even wavers in his hitherto inviolable fidelity to fat women, as he notices how prettily and carelessly her slim young body lies in the great arm-chair into which she has thrown herself. It would hold three Joans.

"And yet," she answers, lifting her white lids, and considering his face awhile, full-eyed, with a quiet smile, as if taking his measure—"and yet, perhaps—who knows?—a heavier one than would be needed to demolish you; it is not the bulky Samsons of this world that are the really strong ones; it is the small and wiry people, who, even if they are thrown down, are up again in a moment, and none the worse!"

"Am I a bulky Samson?" he asks, with a half laugh; "if Samson were only five foot eleven in his shooting-boots, and rode only thirteen stone, history has been very partial to him!" A clock strikes; wrongly, of course. Who ever heard of a drawing-room clock, with a face looking out from amid a lovely flourish of Dresden-china flowers, that told the hours aright? But its voice, though a mistaken one, reminds Wolferstan that there is such a thing as time. "I have been here an hour," he says, "and I meant to stay ten minutes; I will go, but first—tell me—or, of course, if you do not like, do not tell me—what your plans are? with whom you will live? whither are you going? I know that, if I counted the number of times that we have met, I should find that I had no business to ask; but I will not count. Tell me—what is going to become of you?"

He has drawn much nearer to her, and is again looking at her with the same overpowering yet consciously useless compassion. As society stands, a young man is so very powerless to help a young woman! To marry her is the one doubtful kindness he can show her; and marriage, as

at present constituted, does not find favor in Wolferstan's eyes.

"Do not be afraid!" she answers, with a smile that, though sorrowful, is neither cowardly nor broken-spirited. "I am not going to the workhouse, nor yet to the Home for Lost Dogs or Decayed Gentlewomen; I am going to stay with an aunt of mine—a sister of my mother's: though she is my aunt, I have never seen her nor even heard much about her. He never talked to me about my mother's people."

She is looking at him, but he has turned away his face, and is staring out of the window.

"Did not he?" he answers rather indistinctly; a moment after: "An aunt? only an aunt? no uncle?"

"He is dead."

"Any cousins?"

"I fancy so; she says something about the girls."

"Sons?"

"I do not know; I hope not; I dislike male cousins; there is a sort of spurious brotherhood about them!"

"And you will make your home with this aunt? will live with her?"

"Until I can draw breath, and look about me."

He gives an impatient sigh, and a kick to a neighboring footstool.

"Do not look so lamentable!" she says, almost laughing; "it does sound deplorable, I own; almost as bad as some of the cases in the Report of the Governesses' Institution; no present income, no future prospects! But, after all, it might be worse; since I am letting you into my private affairs, I may tell you that I have a thousand pounds that my godfather left me: that, at five per cent., will bring in fifty pounds a year; one cannot positively starve on fifty pounds a year."

"Enough to buy one gown, and perhaps a bonnet, you would have said a week ago."

"Yes," she answers, with a small but stifled sigh; "I must give up being fond of my clothes."

He shakes his head, as if to say that her affairs are beyond his mending.

"Well, in what part of the world am I to think of you, then?" he says, with another sigh, reluctantly taking up his hat.

"I do not flatter myself that you will think of me much, in any part of the world," she says, a little dryly, and without any coquetry; though it is a sentence decidedly susceptible of a coquettish treatment; "but I shall be in Blankshire."

"My thoughts will have no long journey, then; that is my county; do you know what your post-town is?"

"It looks like Helmsley," she answers, drawing from her pocket a large and musky envelope, on which blazes a giant monogram, aflame with all the colors of the prism, and several more besides; "pah! how I hate patchouli! it has infected my pocket-handkerchief and all my other letters!"

"*Helmsley!*" he repeats, with a brightening of eye and alacrity of tone; "is that so, really? Then the plot is thickening: Helmsley is our post-town, too; we are not much more than three miles from it; what is your aunt's name? of course I must know her!"

"Her name is Moberley—Mrs. Moberley."

Wolferstan looks puzzled. "I know a Mrs. Moberley—at least—yes—I suppose I may be said to know her—certainly, quite as much of her as I ever wish to know—but *she* is not your aunt? ha! ha! I wish you could see her—it is odd!" (wrinkling his forehead, and putting one hand up to it as if to help his recollection) "but I thought I knew every living soul within a radius of ten miles of Helmsley. Moberley! Moberley! how stupid of me! can you tell me the name of her house?"

"Portland Villa," replies Joan, following the instinct which prompts us always to swallow three times as often as

usual if we have a sore-throat, and to turn our eyes a second time toward any disagreeable object which has accidentally regaled them, by smelling her aunt's letter again and making a face over it.

Wolferstan's jaw has dropped; in one second the complacence has died out of his face.

"Then it *is* the same?" he says, in a low and awe-struck key; "but—you were joking! she is not your aunt—it is impossible! she cannot be!"

"But she is!" replies Joan, looking in some surprise at his aghast and discomfited features; "why should not she be? is she too young to have a niece?"

"And are the Miss Moberleys your *cousins*—your *first* cousins?" continues the young man, still speaking with a slow and horror-struck emphasis.

"Naturally! if she is my aunt and they are her daughters," says Joan, a little tartly; "that is not a very hard sum to do."

"Gracious Heavens above us!"

"I wish," cries the girl, reddening a little, "that you would be more explicit and less ejaculatory; if you know anything very bad about them, please tell me directly! are they *mad?* have they done anything disgraceful?"

His face catches the flush from hers, but the emotion which expresses itself by the color of a faint, fine sunset on her cheeks, is painted in full, deep copper tints on his.

"You are making me very uncomfortable," she goes on after a moment's waiting, during which, bathed over head and ears in confusion, he is vainly struggling to overtake a speech which ever eludes him, "and it is not fair; you ought to tell me! is there anything odd about them?"

He tries to laugh in a stammering, floundering fashion. "Odd! oh dear, no! not that I know of! upon my honor—please do not look as if you did not believe me—I—I—know nothing to their disadvantage; to tell the truth, I—I—you know I have been a great deal away from home—I—I—hardly know them; it was only that it—it—took me by surprise, don't you know; it—it seemed unlikely."

Her sincere and straightforward eyes are looking directly at and through him; a small grain of half-amused pity steals into them, as he writhes and stutters before her.

"You might be making a speech at a wedding-breakfast," she says, sarcastically; "I never heard anything so halting anywhere else." After a thoughtful pause: "You said you 'wished I could see her,' why did you wish that I should see her? is she such a very remarkable sight?"

During the moment's breathing-space of silence that she gave him, Wolferstan has been making some faintly prosperous efforts to recover his countenance; but, at this question, he has a frightful relapse. Thus, brought face to face with his own words, unable, beneath the honesty of her eyes, to eat them, as he would otherwise be delighted to do, he is too *ébahi* to attempt any answer whatever. Joan looks away in pity from his scarlet discomfiture. There is a pitch of confusion which it makes one hot to witness, and Wolferstan has reached it.

"I will ask you no more questions," she says, quietly. "I see that there is some mystery, which I shall soon have the opportunity of fathoming. I suppose that she is very odd-looking—ungainly? eccentric? dowdy?"—stealing a covert glance at him at each epithet, to see which epithet seems to hit the right nail on the head. "Well, I can forgive her for being any one of the three, or even all three put together!" After a pause: "Though you will not reveal anything about the *people*, you will not mind telling me what sort of a place it is. Is it a good house? are there nice gardens?—a pretty park?"

Wolferstan opens his eyes. "I do not think that there is much *park*," he answers, slowly; "it is not exactly the

sort of place where one expects a park; it is not a large house, you know; in fact —well—a small one!—and it is not very far from—indeed, rather close to—the road."

He makes these admissions as if they were being dragged out of him by hot pincers.

"About how small?" asks Joan, seriously, as she mentally tries to cut and pare down her ideas to the right size. He looks up at the distant ceiling, and round at the wide walls.

"I think the whole of it would pretty nearly go into this room!"

Despite her heartiest efforts, her face lengthens a little.

"It must be a *hovel*," she says, in a low voice; then, resolutely pulling herself together again: "It is no great matter," she says, steadily; "there is something cozy about a small house; there is no hardship in being shut up in a narrow space with nice people—and they *are* nice"—(looking resolutely at him, and speaking with a determined emphasis)—"I *know* they are nice; no one that was not nice could have written this—" (again glancing at the ill-savored missive she holds in her hand). "A letter of condolence is a good test."

He says neither yea nor nay; he has already taken up his hat, and has been in the agonies of going for the last five minutes. Now he puts out his hand. "Good-by," he says, looking at her with a grave and undissembled regret, and—which is not altogether usual with him—neither saying nor looking any more than he thoroughly means; "it is not quite so bad to say 'good-by,' now that I know for certain that we shall soon shake hands again; and meanwhile send me a line, will not you?—'Guards' Club' will always find me—if I can do anything for you."

"It is not a very likely 'if,'" she answers, gently. "No—henceforth no one is to do anything for me. The new *régime* has begun: I am to do everything for myself. I am even learning to dress my own hair; see—it is not so bad!—and, when you come to see me at Portland Villa, you will find it better still. Good-by."

She is smiling, but her eyes are wet: the tears indeed have overbrimmed, and are dropping down her white and fine-grained cheeks.

And so he leaves her. As he walks back the church-bells are dumb, and he neither whistles nor sings. He has lost two grandfathers himself in his day, with grandmothers to match, and borne it like a Trojan. But this is different. He feels as if his hour's stay within those gray walls had made him a soberer, sadder man. But we are creatures of habit; and that very same evening sees him again squeezing his old friend's fingers under the candlestick; indeed, as she is now prepared for the manœuvre, and not unwilling, he finds himself in temporary possession of her whole hand!

## CHAPTER III.

YES! the new *régime* has begun. No one beyond childhood is fond of a new order of things merely because it is new. Everybody hates new boots; most people hate new situations.

On most ears the joy-bells of New-Year's-eve, rashly, and over-hastily mirthful, jar. Why, in Heaven's name, should we pull bells and get drunk, because we are one twelvemonth nearer "the Conqueror Worm?" If it were the worm that rang the bells, we could understand his jollity.

Joan's new *régime*, over which she has about as much reason to exult as we over our new year, may be said to begin as she steams out of the station at Dering, with the footman standing on the platform, and touching his hat to her for the last time. She tried to inaugurate the new epoch last night, when she made a zealous effort to pack her own clothes;

and, after hours of patient but unskilled wrestling, rose from before the imperials, which indignantly disgorged her too numerous gowns—rose fagged and red, yet semi-triumphant under the idea that at least she had succeeded in getting everything in—only to discover behind her a forgotten and overlooked heap, hardly inferior in size and incompressibility to that with which she has been contending. Thereupon the old *régime* returns for the moment, and her maid, who has been looking on in impatient pain at dresses folded in the wrong places—at vacuums where no vacuums should be—and a general inartistic inequality of level, retakes her office and for the last time packs.

When all her imperials — great and many, as if she were an American—are at length shut, locked, and strapped, Joan eyes them with a new distrust.

"If the house is as small as he said, they will never get into it!"

Joan has no good-by kisses to give, at least not to people. She kisses a chair, a walking-stick, a pair of muffetees that she herself had knitted only two months ago; but they do not kiss her back again, and one-sided kissing is, as every one knows, a discouraging employment. She cannot even kiss the fresh spring grass that grows above her grandfather's head, for no fresh green grass does grow above it. He lies far down in a great and peopled vault—the Dering mausoleum, on the building of whose solid grewsomeness some by-gone Dering spent a fortune. It would be small comfort to Joan to go inside the high-spiked iron railings, and give her forlorn good-by kiss to the great stone slabs that cover the entrance. It would be given to twenty others as much as to him.

The journey that is before her is long, so she sets off early. For the last time she opens her eyes on a lace-edged pillow, and looks round at her dainty walls, palely hung in shimmering green, at her toilet-table, at the cheval-glass in which she has so often seen and so thoroughly enjoyed the sight of the reflection of her own figure and Worth's gowns.

The thought just passes through her head, "In what sort of a room shall I wake to-morrow?" but she dismisses it. "What does it matter?"

For the last time she drinks her coffee out of a canary-colored cup, with little ladies and gentlemen making love upon it in the easy, sunshiny, practical way in which china love is always made—a cup so thin and transparent that you hardly feel it between your lips as you sip. For the last time she is carried to the station on C-springs, drawn through the first, sharp freshness of a young April morning by a pair of satin-coated bays, tightly bearing-reined, and loftily stepping over their own noses.

You will say that there is nothing affecting in these "last times;" that if she were parting for the last time with a sweetheart—exchanging with him split rings or crooked sixpences—you could be sorry for her, but not now. And yet he could be much more easily and cheaply replaced than can satin hangings or bay thorough-breds.

For the last time the footman gets her her ticket, for the first and last time (this is perhaps the exact moment when the new life opens and the old one closes) he tells her in which van he has put her boxes; hitherto in all her former travels this has been no concern of hers.

With one ear-piercing yell, as of a lost soul, the train is off, and with a parting view of the footman and of all the porters, looking rather relieved at having one more of the morning trains off their minds, Joan is off too. Past quite familiar fields first—*his* fields, where she seems to know every hedge-row thorn, every pasturing cow, as well as she knows all the little dips and pleasant rises in the park, where the very sunshine and the skittish winds seem to belong specially to the Derings; then past farms and wheat-fields, and rick-yards less familiar; then quite strange.

Joan longs to cry. What do sore-hearted dogs do—dogs who cannot cry—into the wistfulness of whose sorrowful eyes no tears can steal, and yet who have quite as much capacity for the sufferings that the affections cause, as any Niobe that ever wept herself to stone? But Joan can cry, and thanks God for it. The tears are already dripping one after another, quick and large, on her crape lap, when all inclination to weep is suddenly and effectually choked and killed by the discovery that, on the seat opposite to her, a child is deposited—a fat, crêpé-haired, prosperous child—who is staring at her with unblinking, brazen pertinacity; in solemn astonishment that a grown-up person can cry. Then her tears seem dried and burnt up at their fountain; she puts her pocket-handkerchief back into her pocket, feeling sure that she will no longer need it.

It is perhaps as well. One must stop crying some day, and this day, Monday, April 12th, is perhaps as good as any other. It is as difficult to weep in a train with a person opposite looking at you, as it is to eat sandwiches gracefully and comfortably under the like circumstances. By-and-by, finding that Joan furnishes no further phenomena for observation, the child slithers down from its seat, and begins to run playfully up and down the carriage upon the inmates' feet. Then it climbs up again on the seat and thrusts most of its body out of the open window, excluding air and view; being forcibly pulled down and reseated by a palpitating parent, it screws up its nose and howls.

Joan's is a long and weary journey, and there are many changes. The ticket that the footman got her does not last her for the whole length; she has to get another for herself. It is market-day, and for some other and unexplained reason there are more people than usual traveling. She has to stand—one of a long string of people—before the ticket-office, with a heated market-woman before her, and a high-flavored, hurried man treading on her gown, thrusting her on, and roughly urging her to be quick in taking up her change, behind her.

She forgets in which van her luggage was put. She is nearly knocked down by a porter and truck trundling noisily down the platform, inexorable as Destiny and as unalterable in their course. The other porters are overworked and unkind, and have quite laid aside their usual suavity. The attention of most of them is occupied by a furious man-passenger, who has lost his portmanteau and is dealing death and damnation round to the whole staff in consequence. When at length, by dint of painful perseverance, she has induced one of them to give her his reluctant attention, she finds that his whole soul revolts against the number and magnitude of her boxes.

His sense of fitness is evidently jarred by finding that a single woman traveling ignobly alone, without maid or footman or male protector, and who, by all the laws of analogy and probability, should have been contented with one modest canvas-covered box and a carpet-bag, is furnished with an array of imperials that would not disgrace a countess.

From a conscientious desire to economize, she travels the last half of her journey second-class. The carriage is at first full, gorged to repletion with market-people who crowd in in much greater number than the carriage can hold, and jocosely sit upon each other's knees. They gradually diminish, as each station drains a few off, and she is at length left *tête-à-tête* with one man, distinctly drunk, who insists on shaking hands with her when he too, at last, to her infinite relief, gets out. When at length (to her it seems a very long length) the train draws up at Helmsley station, she is alone.

It is evening; well on toward night, indeed, and the station-lamps gleam all arow. Having got out, she stands looking wistfully about to see whether she can notice any one that looks as if he

had come to meet her. In vain. The station is rather empty; there is no one that looks the least expectant, or is eying with any air of possible proprietorship any of the men or women that the train is disburdening itself of. Work being tolerably slack, the porters are able to attend to her. In process of time—it takes time—all her great boxes stand on the platform.

"Where to—please, ma'am?"

"I suppose that they must have sent to meet me," she answers, uncertainly. "Do you know if there is a carriage here? Mrs. Moberley's carriage?"

"What name did you say, 'm?"

"Moberley—Mrs. Moberley," speaking with painstaking distinctness.

He shakes his head.

"Do not know any one of that name. —Jim, run and see whether there's a carriage a-waiting."

In two minutes Jim is back.

"There ain't no carriage of any kind."

A disheartened chill creeps over Joan. They have neither come nor sent.

"There is no cart for the luggage then, either, of course?"

"No, there ain't no cart neither."

"I must hire a fly, then, I suppose," she says, swallowing a sigh. "*Will* one fly take them all? if not, I must have two flies."

"There ain't no flies here, 'm," replies the porter, suavely; "unless you order them aforehand."

"No flies!" repeats Joan, eyes and mouth both opening in utterest discomfiture; "then how *am* I to get there?"

"They keep a fly at the Railway Inn, 'm," says Jim, who is younger and tenderer-hearted than his comrade. "You can have that if it is not out."

"And where is the Railway Inn?" she asks, catching at this straw, and with a faint gleam of comfort dawning on her soul. "Is it near?"

"Just over the way, 'm," he answers, pointing across the line to the other side of the station; "not more nor a hundred yards off."

"Will you go and order it for me then, please?" she cries, eagerly; "tell them to get it ready at once—as soon as ever they can!" (lapsing unintentionally into the tones of polite authority and command that have been habitual to her all her life).

"If it is in, 'm; but it is mostly out."

With this cold comfort he leaves her. She sits down on the smallest of her boxes, with a weighty dressing-case that makes her knees ache, on her lap. She looks vacantly round; first at an engine that is fussing and snorting about by itself; then at a man who is shutting up the book-stall; then through the doors of the glaring refreshment-room at the giant-headed young ladies and commercial travelers exchanging gallantries. By-and-by her emissary comes back.

"Please, 'm, it is out!"

"*Out!*"

She has not faced this possibility, though he has warned her of its likelihood. It seemed one of those things that are too bad to be true.

"It took a party up to Brickhill this afternoon, and it ain't back yet; they do not expect it back for another couple of hours!"

"Then what *am* I to do?" says Joan, still sitting on her box, and speaking with slow desperation.

She does not mean it as a question put to the porter, but more as an ejaculation, a protest addressed to Destiny—to Nature—to the dumb, distant sky, where all the nightly fires are beginning to be lit. But he takes it to himself.

"Perhaps, 'm, if you would step across and speak to Mr. Smith yourself—it is he as keeps the Railway Inn."

"I will," she says, catching at the suggestion; "thank you."

And so rises, and staggers across the line as quickly as the weight of her dressing-case will let her.

"Just oppo-*site*, 'm," says the porter,

leaning heavily and lengthily on the last syllable of the word, accompanying her outside the station and pointing. "You cannot miss it!"

Then he goes and leaves her alone in the world.

Oh, why—oh, why did not he stay and escort her? But he spoke truth. She cannot miss it. "Railway Inn" in gilt letters across the wall; "Railway Inn" in gilt letters across the blinds. It "tells its name to all the hills," as plainly as Wordsworth's cuckoo. About the door stand a knot of men enjoying bad tobacco, starlight, and small beer, and before the door stands a butcher's cart, whose master has evidently just pulled up to refresh himself.

They all take their pipes out of their mouths, and stop talking as she approaches. Joan has entered a score of well-thronged drawing-rooms, has made her courtesy to her sovereign and danced with her sovereign's sons, with a good deal less nervousness than she now experiences in introducing herself to this half-dozen of convivial boors.

"I am sorry to hear that your fly is out," she says, abruptly, and looking from one to the other, as not knowing to which her question belongs.

"Yes, miss, it is; it took a party to Brickhill this—"

"I know," she answers, interrupting; "and have you no other conveyance? no wagonette? no dog-cart?"

"I 'ave a dog-cart, miss, but you see my son has took it to market to Ongar this morning, and he's oftenest not back afore ten or eleven!"

What camel's back could stand such a last straw as this? Were it not for the audience Joan would put down her dressing-case in the dusty road, would sit upon it, and break into forlorn weeping. As it is, she only looks round rather pitifully—for they are not drunk, and seem quite ready to be civil and sorry—and says, sighing patiently:

"Then I must *walk;* do you think you could help me to find a boy to carry *this?* it is very heavy, I do not think that I could carry it for three miles, and I believe that that is the distance."

"If you please, miss, which direction is it you are going in?" asks a man who has not spoken hitherto; a man with a purple nose, a husky voice, and one of those blue blouses that all oxen, calves, and sheep, must regard with so lively a distrust and aversion.

"I am afraid that I do not know even that," she answers, turning to this new interlocutor, and speaking with a starved little smile. "I only know the name of the house, and the name of the lady to whom it belongs—Portland Villa—Mrs. Moberley—Mrs. Moberley—Portland Villa!" laboriously repeating and elaborating each syllable.

"Po-ortland Villa!" repeats he, dubiously; "you do not happen to know, miss, which side of the town it is on? they've been building a many new villas lately.—Bill, do you know where Pò-ortland Villa is?"

Bill shakes his head. He does not know. None of them know. Portland Villa is apparently not much known to fame.

"I should not wonder," suggests the landlord, presently, "if it were one of them houses on the London Road; little houses with a bit of garden at the back, about three miles out of the town; just after you pass the Cancer 'Orspital and afore you come to the Lunatic Asylum."

Joan shudders. Good Heavens! What a situation!

"If that is your road, miss," says the husky butcher, affably, "why it is mine too; I can give you a lift as far as the 'orspital; it won't take me none out of my way."

"You are very good," answers Joan, not yet quite taking in the situation; "thank you very much; you are going to drive in that direction?"

He nods toward the cart, and the stout gray horse, who, with his nose in a

bag, is waiting with the good-humored patience engendered by long habit outside in the starlight.

"That is my cart, miss, and I don't mind giving you a ride in it."

She gives a little unintentional gasp, but happily nobody notices it. It is not often, perhaps, that it has happened to a lady to drive in the morning to a station in a barouche, behind a pair of sleek thorough-breds, and with a six-foot London footman to open the door for her: and to drive *from* a station in the evening in a butcher's cart. However, it is butcher's cart or nothing, so she chooses the former. Not being used to mounting into carts, and being tired and rather faint, she shows no great agility, and a chair is brought out to aid her. By its help she clambers in, and her dressing-case is solemnly handed up after her. It is the first time that it also has traveled in a butcher's cart. Once seated, she looks apprehensively round to see whether any dismembered calf or murdered lamb is to be her companion. The butcher apparently divines her fears.

"Quite empty, miss," he says, reassuringly; "there ain't no jints!" Then he takes a stirrup-cup from the fair hand of an easy-mannered bar-maid, strips off the nose-bag, climbs in without a chair, shakes the reins, crying "Tcl!" and they are off.

For the first few minutes, Joan is entirely occupied by the novelty of her sensations. She wonders how she will turn a somersault backward over the backless bench. It seems to her only a question of time. And then how it shakes! The treatment that a physic-bottle experiences appears to her gentle in comparison of that to which she is subjected. She feels as if all her vital organs were getting hopelessly mixed and entangled together. Joan has hitherto only seen life from the boxes or stalls. She is now beginning to learn how engaging it can look from the upper galleries. It is a fair, meek night, not very light, for not all the million little stars can make up for the absence of the one great moon; but yet a very gentle twilight, by which lovers might kiss, and friends softly talk. The station is a mile distant from Helmsley town: by-and-by they are jolting and clattering over the streets; cabs and carraiges pass them: lamp-posts hold up their yellow lights to out-twinkle the white stars: people are walking along the *trottoir;* dirty girls, idle soldiers, staring into such shops as are still open; policemen. Then out of the town again, along a road that is neither a road nor yet a street—a melancholy hybrid—dreary as only the outskirts of a town can be. Just-begun houses—half-finished houses, with the poles of their scaffoldings gauntly cutting the sky; heaps of bricks. She shudders with a feeling of disheartened repulsion, saying to herself in heart-sickness, "Is it possible that it can be here?" But Fate is not quite so unkind. Farther still, till the country begins to be almost country again; till the fields grow grass instead of bricks; till the trees are trees with leafy crowns instead of naked scaffolding-poles. A large building in all the harshness of utter squareness is lifting itself before their eyes; sulkily outlined against the pensive night. Her companion pulls up.

"This is the 'orspital, miss."

Again she shudders. What a ghastly and ominous finger-post to point her to her destination!

"That is your road, miss" (pointing with his whip). There is no chair to help her this time; so she scrambles down as best she can.

"No obligation at all, miss! I wish you good-night."

The old gray is in a hurry, apparently; for he is off before she can make up her mind as to whether his master would be insulted by being offered a tip or no. She is left standing alone in the middle of the road. It is very still—very silent. There is not a passer-by; no smallest sound hits the ear. There is no light save what the stars give, and a dull red glim-

mer from two or three of the windows of the great lazar-house beside her. What if she had been misled by a wrong information? What if Portland Villa do not lie in this direction at all? What will she do then? She will have to beg for a night's lodging at the 'orspital.

With a heart beating hard and quick from fear, and sick and weary with inanition, she hastens, as quickly as the weight that she has to carry will let her, toward the indicated goal. Four mean little detached houses (even by this flattering starlight she can see that they are mean) lie ahead of her; each seated in its garden-plot; each with its own small carriage-drive and stone-posted entrance-gates. She reaches the first, and ravenously reads the name that, painted in black letters, adorns the gate-posts: "Sardanapalus Villa!" On to the next: "De Cressy Villa!" The third: "Campidoglio Villa!" There is only one more. For a moment she dares not look. Too much hangs on the issue of that glance. For a moment she looks in the other direction; then gathering up her courage, turns her eyes upon the fateful posts: "Portland Villa!"

## CHAPTER IV.

"....The little dogs and all,
Tray, Blanche, and Sweetheart, see they bark at me!"

It is not quite easy to make out the name at a glance, from the fact that, through lack of a renewal of paint, the P has nearly disappeared. Still, enough of it remains to prove that it once was there; enough to make Joan's sunk spirits rise again with a leap.

It is right, then! It is Portland Villa, at last. The landlord's instructions were correct. She puts out her hand to unlatch the gate; only to discover that it is off its hinges, and—to remedy this defect—is tightly tied up with string. She sets down her dressing-case in the road, while her fingers struggle to untie the manifold hard knots which guard the entrance to Mrs. Moberley's bower.

While she is thus employed she hears a scampering of many little feet on the graveled drive, and from the house rushes forth a volley of dogs, one over another. There seem to be twenty, at least; but subsequent counting reduces them to six: all smallish; all apparently deeply, warmly hostile; all barking with a deafening volubility; all breathing wrath and indignation against the profane intruder who is tampering with their entrance-gates at ten o'clock at night. Their harmony accompanies her all the time that she is struggling with the knots. They also make it doubtful to her whether the bell which she has pulled on reaching the door has really rung. They bark themselves nearly off their own legs; and, if there were any dead in the neighborhood, would infallibly wake them.

But their conversation has changed in tone. It no longer means enmity so much as excitement, agitation, half-welcome. Having smelt her clothes to be good and genteel, they have convinced themselves that in such a gown she cannot be come begging. Anyhow, theirs is the only welcome she seems likely to get; for, whether the bell rang or no, it is certain that nobody answers it. She rings again, and again waits. Nothing happens. Can it be the wrong day? Is it possible that they are all out?—even the servants; and that this army of little dogs is keeping house alone?

She pulls out her aunt's letter from her pocket, and tries to decipher it by the starlight. "Monday, April 12th," as plain as Charles Wain above her head. If there be a mistake it is not hers. Emboldened by this fact, she rings a third time. After a considerable interval (not of silence, for the six dogs do not permit that, but of patient, dispirited waiting) she hears a slow and solid foot coming along the passage inside. A bolt is with-

drawn; the door opens; a flood of light flows out from a lit hall, and a person—a female person—appears in the aperture.

"I suppose that Mrs. Mob—" begins Joan, then stops, for some lightning-quick intuition tells her that—wildly improbable as it seems—*this* is Mrs. Moberley.

"Why, *I* am Mrs. Moberley, my dear," says that lady, putting out both hands and drawing the girl in with them. "I did not think it could be you, because I did not hear any wheels; to tell you the truth, I think I must have been having forty winks.—Hold your tongues, dogs! get away, Regy! get away, Algy! get away, Charlie! get away, Mr. Brown!"

During this speech Miss Dering is regarding her aunt with an intensity of gaze hardly compatible with her usual good manners; but, indeed, it is difficult to look at Mrs. Moberley on a first introduction in any other way than intensely.

Mrs. Moberley is certainly startlingly fat; but so you may say are many ladies, who, having outlived the thinning excitements of girlhood, take life easily, relish their food, and lapse without much difficulty into slumber. But Mrs. Moberley's is not that tight, compact, well-busked fat which, to one class of minds, is not without its attractiveness. Hers is of the unsteady order that destroys all landmarks and laughs at boundary-lines. Mrs. Moberley is absolutely without any shape at all.

"I do not know what Sarah can be thinking of not to have answered the bell!" she goes on, as she recloses the door and refastens the bolt; "but I suspect the fact is, that she is at her supper; and, as I always say to the girls, it is my belief that, if the last trump were to sound while she was at her supper, she would wait till she had finished before she would attend to it—ha! ha!" Her very laugh is fat. If your eyes were shut you could swear that it had not proceeded from a slight person.

Joan is speechless. She is thinking that she no longer wonders at Wolferstan's wish that she could see her aunt. Certainly she is well worth seeing.

"But where are your things, child? what have you done with your luggage?" continues Mrs. Moberley, recovering from her mirth, and preparing to reopen the door; "are they outside?"

"I had to leave them at the station; I could not get a fly—there was not one."

"No fly!" repeats her aunt, in high and staccato accents of astonishment; "why, what had become of the fly from the Railway Inn? they have a very good fly there—quite a smart one; the girls always say that you could not tell it from a private carriage at a little distance."

"It was out."

"And—you—walked—all—the—way? Three miles and a half if it is a step" (opening her eyes as widely as the encroachments of her cheeks will let her).

"No, I did not," replies Joan, with an hysterical laugh, for she has eaten but one bun all day, is faint and most weary, and it is so much worse than she had expected. "I came in a butcher's cart as far as the Cancer Hospital."

"In a butcher's cart!" (lifting up hands and eyes). "This will be a fine story for the girls; I am afraid they will never let you hear the last of it. I wonder"—in a tone of quickened interest—"was it our butcher? You did not happen to notice the name on the cart, did you?"

"I never thought of looking," replies Joan, still struggling with a most painful inclination to laugh violently and cry violently at the same moment. "I do not think that he could have been yours, though; he did not seem to know you when I mentioned your name."

"In a butcher's cart!" repeats Mrs. Moberley, still chuckling with fat relish; "it was lucky it was night, was not it? people would have stared to see a stylish girl like you perched up in a butcher's cart, would not they?"

All this time they have been in the passage; but now Mrs. Moberley puts her

arm round her niece—first giving her several hearty kisses—and begins to lead her toward the interior of the bower. But the passage is narrow; and, on peril of becoming wedged between the walls, they have to part company and enter the drawing-room in single file.

Joan had thought that her heart was already so low down that it would be impossible to abase it any farther, but the sight of the drawing-room undeceives her. It is not that it is shabby, though it is that too in a very high degree, but there are many worse things in this world than shabbiness. It is the air of slipshod finery about it which so utterly capsizes the poor remnant of Joan's spirits. A white paper, freely starred with large (once gold) heavenly bodies; many ornaments of a shelly, sparry nature, inexpensively florid; an impression of much cheap pink ribbon and gobble-stitch lace; and—though the month is wealthy April—not a flower, with the exception of a giant bunch of artificial ones under a glass shade.

"This is the drawing-room!" says Mrs. Moberley, introducing it with an air of pleased proprietorship; "we have not laid out much money upon it, for the excellent reason that we have not had much to lay—ha! ha! but the girls have managed to make it look pretty smart too, have not they?"

"They have indeed," replies Joan, emphatically, looking round with rather a moonstruck air, and taking in many details of wool, of beads, of red Bohemian glass, which at the first *coup-d'œil* had escaped her notice.

"In a butcher's cart," repeats Mrs. Moberley, again resuming her chuckle, and sinking down into a chair in order the more luxuriously to enjoy it; "it really is the richest thing I ever heard! The girls meant to have gone and met you to-day—they had put their hats on, on purpose—when—who should come in but Micky—Micky Brand, you know; or, rather, of course you do not know, and whisked them off to tea at the Barracks!"

"Yes?"

Her eyes have strayed to the dogs, who, now silent, and consenting to her adoption into the family, are sitting all six in a row, very close together before the low fire, and, occasionally overcome by sleep, falling against each other.

"He—would—not—take 'no,'" continues Mrs. Moberley, slowly; "he is so droll, is Micky; a vast deal of dry humor about him! I am sure that you and he will get on like a house on fire: I can see that you are just the sort of girl he will take to at once."

"Am I?" (with a sickly little smile).

Joan is angry with herself for being so monosyllabic, but her tongue refuses to frame any words longer than "yes" or "no." There is one monosyllabic word, indeed, which her whole soul is crying aloud, but her lips do not venture to utter it, and that word is "tea!"

"He is in the 170th, you know," pursues Mrs. Moberley, warming with her theme. "I did not mention to you in my letter that Helmsley was a garrison-town; I thought it would be a little surprise for you!" She is looking at her with such an air of good-natured expectancy, as she makes this exciting revelation, that Joan is really and honestly sorry that she cannot look more exhilarated by it. "A regiment is the making of a country place, is not it?" continues her aunt, complacently; "and these are a very dashing set of fellows, they keep us all alive!"

Joan is saved from the necessity of answering a question to which she feels so incapable of making a satisfactory response, by the behavior of the dogs, who, in a moment, are all awake, and on their legs; barking again with hardly less violent unanimity than that with which they greeted Miss Dering.

"Hold your tongues, dogs!" cries Mrs. Moberley; "hold your tongue, Mr. Brown! you are always the ringleader!"

But small heed pays Mr. Brown. With one flying leap he is out of the window, followed by his five brothers and sisters; and all are barking their hearts out at their ease in the starlight. "It is the girls!" explains Mrs. Moberley; "and," with a look of pleased alertness, "I think I hear a man's voice too, do not you? I believe it is Micky; he said he should very likely come to make his bow to you, but I took it for a joke."

By this time the dogs' clamor is hushed. They are evidently apologizing for their mistake.

"Do not go yet!" cries a high, young voice outside; "it is quite early! come in and have some brandy and soda-water!"

"Do not offer what you have not got," cries Mrs. Moberley, raising her voice, and laughingly calling through the window; "there is no soda-water in the house!"

"I modify my invitation, then," replies the young voice; "come in and have some brandy without the soda-water!" (laughing also).

But this Bacchanalian offer is apparently declined; for, after a few seconds of further parley, carried on in too low a key to be overheard, the Miss Moberleys enter the house and the room alone.

"What have you done with Micky?" cries their mother, eagerly. "Why did not you bring him in?"

"He would not come," replies one of the girls; "he said he had not time; but we think that it was because he had his mess-jacket on; he knows that it is not becoming!"

"Evidently anxious to make a good impression at first sight!" says Mrs. Moberley, and they all laugh—all but Joan.

Mirth is indeed far from Miss Dering's thoughts. At the present moment she is occupied in gazing at her two first-cousins with hardly less intensity than that which marked her first view of their mother. And yet they are of no uncommon type. Had she seen them officiating in the Helmsley refreshment-room, or behind the counter at the fancy repository in the little town near Dering, she would have passed them without an observation. It is as *first-cousins—her* first-cousins—that they strike her as so astounding. First-cousins! in such hats! such jackets! such ear-rings! such beads! and with such a trolloping length of uncurled curls down their backs! Had you told her that Mr. Brown and Algy were her first cousins, it would have seemed to her less surprising.

"I dare say you do not know which is which!" says Mrs. Moberley, following the direction of her niece's eyes, and regarding her progeny with a contained pride. "I dare say you are trying to make out which is Bell, and which is Di, without my telling you. Do you see much likeness between them?" she goes on a moment later, as Joan still maintains a stupefied silence; "some say they might be twins, others do not see it. I suppose"—with a good-natured glance round the room, comprehensively inclusive—"I suppose there is a family look among us all."

"We are not at all alike really," cries the younger, least beaded, least vivid-looking of the two girls, in an anxious voice; "if we seem so at first, it goes off after a while."

"I am sorry we were not back in time to receive you," says the other, sitting down and taking off her hat. "Diana and I meant to have gone to meet you; we were just setting off, when—mother has told you?—he came on purpose—he gave us no peace!"

"I dare say you were very glad," says Diana, bluntly. "We should have crowded you up; I dare say that there was not more than enough room for you and your boxes in the fly?"

"The fly, indeed!" cries Mrs. Moberley, beginning to laugh again, "a fine fly!—It is evident that they are not in the secret. Is not it, Joan?"

At the sound of her own Christian

name (and after all what else is her own aunt likely to call her?) Joan gives a slight and involuntary shudder, but it passes harmless and unobserved amid the fire of question, answer, ejaculation, and retort, that now ensues.

"You must have passed us on the road," says Bell, presently. "Did you notice? we were walking two and two; Diana and Micky in front, and I and another officer behind: we did not see you, but then"—laughing affectedly—"you were in the very last place where we should ever have thought of looking for you."

"Did it jolt very badly?" asks Diana, fixing upon her cousin's small wan face a pair of honest and very well-opened eyes, filled with compassionate inquiry; "worse than a 'bus? were you much shaken? you look so tired!" The genuine, rough pity of her tone goes nigher to upsetting Miss Dering than all her former discomfitures. The tears rush to her eyes.

"It has been a long day," she says, faltering; "I set off early."

"And have you had nothing to eat?" cries Diana, turning her quick eyes round the room, in search of those signs of conviviality which are conspicuous by their absence; "no tea? nothing?" Then, as Joan observes an embarrassed silence, she goes on—her healthy cheeks flushing a little—"There is never much to eat or drink in this house, and what there is is not at all appetizing, but at least we can give you some tea."

So saying, she hastily leaves the room. It is some time—to Joan it seems a very long time—before she returns. At length, however, she reappears, bearing in her hands a tray, and with a face so very much heightened and deepened in tint as sufficiently proves that she herself has been the cook.

"The servants had gone to bed," she says, apologetically; "the fire was nearly out, and the kettle would not boil. Come, Joan"—eying rather ruefully the sorry fare—"I am sorry that there is nothing more inviting, but it is the best we have."

Joan obeys, nothing loath. The tea is very weak and rather smoky, and it is clear that one need go no farther than an English hedge for its original home; the bread is very stale, and the butter very salt, but, to a person who within the last twenty-four hours has refreshed herself with but one cup of coffee and one bun, few drinks do not seem to be nectar, few viands do not taste succulently.

It is a long, long while after Miss Dering has come to the end of her meagre refreshment, before the idea of going to bed presents itself to the minds of Mrs. Moberley or her daughters. At last, at last—a very long last—and when Joan can no longer hinder her tired head from sinking forward on her breast in uncomfortable jerky slumber, there comes a lull—a talk of going to bed, a dawdling, chattering preparation for carrying the idea into execution, and lastly a lighting of candles.

"Good-night, Joan," says her aunt, holding both her hands and looking at her with good-natured eyes, which evidently once were large, but which now, through the dishonest usurpation of her cheeks of territory not belonging to them, are decidedly small. "I hope we shall see some more red in these cheeks to-morrow. Your mother used to have such a fine color, quite as high as Bell's, if not higher; often and often people have asked me if she were not painted." A moment later: "Do not trouble to get up to breakfast to-morrow, child—we often do not; we never have any particular breakfast-hour—only just as any of us feel inclined. This is Liberty Hall, my dear, Liberty Hall." So saying, she looses her niece's little chill hands, and, nodding her head several times, disappears into her bower, while Joan, escorted by her two cousins, drags her weary legs up the narrow deal staircase of "Liberty Hall."

"This is your room," says Diana, throwing open a door and waving her flat

candlestick about, so as to exhibit its dimensions, "the guest-chamber of *Liberty Hall*," with a little sarcastic mimicking of her mother's tone. "I will not say that I hope you will find it comfortable, because I know you will not."

"There is a bed," answers Joan, with a small smile of utter weariness; "that seems to me the only thing of the least importance just now."

But, if she imagines that this broad hint will rid her of the company of her relations, she is greatly mistaken. Diana sets down the candle, and Arabella seats herself upon a cane-bottomed chair. To hide her disappointment Joan walks to the window.

"You have the best view in the house," says Arabella, complacently; "you can see everything that goes along the road better even than from the drawing-room."

But it is air, not view, that Miss Dering craves. The room feels close and confined. She throws up the sash, which instantly and clamorously falls down again.

"It always does that," says Arabella, composedly; "there has been something odd about it for months. It keeps open pretty well with a bit of wood; there generally is a bit of wood, but of course Sarah has lost it."

She sets the candlestick on the floor as she speaks, and all three girls grovel on all-fours on the carpet in search of the missing wedge. By-and-by Diana finds it under the washhand-stand, and with it the decrepit window is propped open to admit the gentle April winds.

"I know you are longing for us to go," says Diana, brusquely, when this feat is accomplished.—"Come along, Bell, come! it is cruelty to animals to keep her out of bed.—Of course we will send our maid to dress your hair in the morning; she has not at all a bad idea of hair-dressing, though indeed we taught her everything she knows; she always does ours!"

Joan looks at the colossal heads before her, and shudders. "Thank you," she answers, rather hastily, "but indeed I have got quite into the habit of doing my own; I like it; it makes one feel so independent; good-night!"

Are they really going now? It seems so. Arabella is already out of the room, and Diana is at the door, when—oh, sorrow!—she returns.

"I hope you do not mind the light in your eyes in the morning," she says, looking up at the window; "unfortunately there is no blind, and the curtains do not draw very well, I am afraid; there is something the matter with the rings; but if you pin them over it does nearly as well. Have you got some good big 'corking-pins?' because, if not, I will run and get you some."

Regardless whether she is speaking truth or fiction, Joan asseverates that she has plenty of corking-pins. There is no commodity, however improbable, with which she would not declare herself to be richly provided, in order to obtain the one boon for which her whole sad, tired soul craves—solitude.

Gone at last—really gone! And now she may sigh as loudly as she likes, and look round her with as undisguised disapprobation on her surroundings as they naturally inspire. When one is at a very low ebb, physically, it takes but a little to overset one. Joan, at her best and strongest—the real Joan—would be ashamed to let any sordid *entourage* make her cry; but she is tired and below par, and tears of forlorn discomfiture fill her eyes, as she looks round on the threadbare carpet—on the large and straggly ugliness of the wall-paper, and notices that a bit is missing from the spout of the ewer.

She stands before the chest of drawers that serves as dressing-table, and looks at herself in the glass that is upon it. "I shall grow like them in time," she says, shuddering; "in time I shall learn to talk of men by their surnames, and to have a refreshment-room head of hair!" She pulls her hair down on her forehead to

simulate a fringe, sets her hat at the back of her head, and tries to look like them; then, in a paroxysm of disgust, dashes the locks away from her brows and tosses her hat down. "No! I hope I may die first."

She says this aloud, and with such emphasis that her voice drowns the sound of a small knock that comes at the door. It has to be repeated before she hears it; then she hastily pulls her countenance into shape again, and cries, "Come in." (Here they are, back again.)

It is not "they," however. It is only Diana, looking rather shy. You would have said, half an hour ago, that a girl in such a hat, and with two such curls, could not look shy, but yet she does.

"I have not come for anything particular," she says, speaking very fast and confusedly; "it was only that it struck me just now that we had none of us said that we were glad to see you; we have none of us any manners. I dare say that you have found that out already—but we *are* glad—that is all! I will not come back again."

While making this speech she is redder than any July field-poppy, and redder still when, having given Joan a quick and shamefaced kiss, she flies out of the room again, banging the creaky door after her, and leaving Joan remorseful. And Joan's last thought before she closes her fagged eyes in her little, hard, lumpy bed, which feels as if it were stuffed with good-sized potatoes, is not of her spoutless jug or propped window, of all she has lost and all she is going to suffer—but of the kind and rosy face of her little underbred cousin.

Joan is not very old, but she has already learned this, that—whether ill-dressed, or well-dressed, whether well-bred, or ill-bred—love is the one thing very much worth having in this world. If they will love her, she will forgive them everything—even the size of their heads, and their taste for soldiers.

## CHAPTER V.

When one is twenty years old—when one's heart is as full of sadness and tiredness as it can well hold—when one has traveled many hours at a stretch in a noisy train—then one is pretty certain to sleep deeply and sweetly, even though one's mattress be copiously stuffed with cobble-stones, even though one's head be too low and one's feet too high, and one's bed altogether so surprisingly narrow as to require very judicious and quiet lying in, to hinder one from bodily falling out. Often, in her ocean of down in the green-hung room at Dering, has she slept less completely. Pulses quickly beating to the tune of some past excitement, or coming pleasure, have often made her toss and turn and look eagerly window-ward for the waving of morning's gray flag; but now there is neither excitement behind, nor pleasure ahead, and the slower morning comes the better; and so she sleeps.

God is good, and does not even send her a dream. If it came it would surely be a dream of better things and better days, and so it is well away. Not even the unnatural elevation of her feet by the capriciously-stuffed mattress, nor the depression of her head by the little, meagre, featherless pillow, succeeds in giving her a nightmare. She might have been still asleep now had not it been for the inefficiency of the curtain-rings, of which Diana overnight had warned her. The corking-pin had indeed drawn the skimped curtains together somewhere about their middle; but up above there is a vacuum through which a wave of morning light rolls and washes under her eyelids. She turns sleepily over on the other side, but even then the wave reaches her, and so does the vigorous melody of a thrush-voice sweetly rebuking her sloth:

"Good-morrow! good-morrow! the sun was awake!
Long ago in the blue summer skies;
Birds in the brake
Carol sweet for your sake!
O lady fair, arise!
That morn fresh grace may borrow
From your dear eyes."

He says all this so loudly that the sleepy lady has to listen to him. She turns over once or twice again, nearly tumbling out of her strait couch as she does it. But it is useless; both glorious light and happy bird combine to forbid further rest. The bird, indeed, sings another verse:

"Good-morrow! good-morrow!
So whispers the breeze,
O'er the lake as it flutters and sighs;
So murmur the bees from the scented lime-trees;
O lady fair arise,
Arise and give good-morrow!
The dearest of replies."

So in despair she sits up, rubs her blue eyes like a child with her knuckles, and looks round. It is a well-known fact that rude and outspoken daylight tells many hometruths about things that politer candle-light either slurs over or is civilly silent upon. If Joan's new room had looked unhandsome overnight by the light of one composite candle, it certainly does not look more lovesome now that day's strong lamp is held up to its shortcomings. It would take a great effort of memory on the part of its owners, a great flight of imagination on the part of Joan, to reconstruct the pattern of the carpet; so utterly has it disappeared under the tread of the numberless feet that have evidently walked upon it. Of paint on door and wainscot there is so little as to be hardly worth naming; there is a zigzag crack across the looking-glass interfering with one's view of one's nose; and the piece missing from the water-jug spout is larger than it appeared overnight. It is now seen to amount to the loss of almost the whole spout. But eight hours of sleep have put new strength and courage into Joan. Not even the squalor of having a jug without a spout can make her cry; she feels as strong and as bright as the new day. She jumps out of bed, and runs on bare, light feet to the window. She unfastens the curtain, carefully laying aside the friendly corking-pin with a thrifty instinct born of her new circumstances. Most likely there is not another in the household. There is no blind, as you know, to draw up; so at once she stands face to face with the morning. It is not early dawn, as she sees at once; it is dawn's elder brother. The sun is already pretty high; she looks up at him fondly, though he rewards her by making the water pour down her cheeks. He and the moon are the only two old friends that are left her. Then she looks out curiously at the prospect. There is the gate at which her tired fingers fumbled last night; there is the little mean sweep up which the execrations of the dogs accompanied her. Three of them are standing at the present moment watchfully on the lookout for some passer-by to pounce out on and insult. A shabby grass-plot, with a bed of ill-to-do shrubs, long-legged laurels, and cypress abortions in the middle; then the road. A cart full of manure is passing along it. Bell was right; there is an excellent view of it. She puts her head farther out to extend her view. On the right the three little brother villas. People get up in them earlier, apparently, than they do here. A woman is standing at the door of our next-door neighbor shaking a hearth-rug; beyond, again, the great, unsightly hospital; larger, unsightlier than ever by daylight. She shudders. How could any one have built his dwelling so near that temple of pain and uncleanness? She looks away quickly, and turns her eyes toward the left.

What a contrast! On one hand, disease, anguish, ugly death. On the other, life that seems unending: beauty without peer; joy and mirth unrivaled. A great plain of most shining silver, laughing in

the morning's eyes—the sea! The sea makes some people bilious: to other people its immortal restlessness gives the blues. But neither bile nor blues interfere with Joan's utter love for it. It is her own familiar friend. She stretches out her arms toward it, and laughs aloud in joyful greeting.

After all, there may be pleasant things yet ahead in life. Whether or not any one else in the house is up, she, at least, can no longer waste time in bed. Instinct tells her that in this establishment it will be useless to make any efforts toward the obtaining of hot water. Rather to her surprise, however, and much to her relief, she finds a great jug of cold; a jug with a spout, but (to hinder it from exalting itself too much above its brother, on this score) without a handle. Having washed and dresssed; having brushed her dusty gown with the awkwardness engendered by utter want of practice; having plaited her smooth hair and instinctively tried to make her head look even smaller than usual, she puts on her hat, opens her paintless door, and slips quickly and quietly down-stairs. Not a soul to be seen! not a sound to be heard!

As she reaches the bottom of the stairs, a great, slow-speaking clock from the hospital strikes eight. Clearly they do not rise with the lark at Portland Villa. She goes into the drawing-room—a tawdry desolation! It is exactly as it was left overnight; furniture higgledy-piggledy; chair-covers rucked; antimacassars awry.

The sun-shafts are smiting, with bright rebuke, the dead-white ashes in the dreary fireplace. It is a disagreeable sight, and Joan hastens away from it. She goes to the hall-door and tries it: it is locked, and not all her efforts can turn the key. There is, however, a door at the back, which is not only unlocked, but ajar. It has clearly been open all night.

In the happy consciousness of having nothing worth stealing, the Moberley family is able to throw its portals hospitably wide to any passing burglar. No doubt there was neither lock nor bolt on Diogenes's tub. She walks out into the little garden: a morsel of flower-border first, then a strip of kitchen-garden in all the amiability of unpruned raspberry-bushes, ragged apple-trees, triumphant groundsel.

Our next-door neighbor has turned his garden into a drying-ground: in the morning wind his clothes are flapping and dancing. By a careful survey of them, you may tell approximately the age, sex, and number, of his belongings. From these a clean and soapy smell is wafted over the hedge to Joan's nostrils. It does not take her long to make the circuit of the domain. In five minutes she is back in the flower-garden again. It is as if the drawing-room had walked out-of-doors. There is the same sordid, meagre disorder; weedy gravel-walks, long-unmown, rank grass, an old laurel-tree, into which, apparently—(it having a forked branch)—every odd-come-short that the family has not known where else to deposit through a long series of years, has been put—a scythe, several broken pots, a wooden box, a broken-backed book, a discolored torn neckerchief, an old pair of gloves. If Joan look long and closely enough, no doubt she will discover among the miscellaneous contents the missing spout of her jug.

The garden has evidently once formed part of a better, larger one, belonging to an elder house, which has no doubt been knocked down to make way for this little smug band of pretentious bald hovels, for an ancient sundial stands neglected—in its air of out-at-elbows gentility—on the grass-plot. But, amid all the ugliness and squalidness, there is beauty too. Spring is so generous—April so open-handed—that they will not pass by even Portland Villa. They have given it a pear-tree, all in bridal white; one load of thick blossom-bunches, you could hardly put a pin between them; they have given it also groups of vigorous daffodils, clumps of polyanthus, smelling of spring; milk-

white arabis haunted by the drowsy, booming bees. Joan smells all the flowers; mounts on the base of the sundial; traces with her finger the trite, sad sentence on its discolored face, "Tempus fugit." Tiny lichens, disapproving of the truism, are filling up the letters.

Then she returns to the laurel-tree, and looks carefully and hopefully for the spout of her jug, but it is not there. Still nothing happens: no one is either seen or heard. All the other houses are up and dressed. The scions of Campidoglio Villa are playing in the garden; the wife of Sardanapalus Villa is feeding her chickens; only Portland Villa still slumbers and sleeps. In despair she returns to the house; opens all the doors in succession as loudly as she can; makes her feet tread as noisily as they are able on the oil-cloth. It is no use: nobody wakes. She passes down the little sweep to the gate; says something polite and suitable to each of the dogs, who all receive her with an extravagant and overdone civility; passes out into the road with all six at her heels, and saunters toward the sea. Toward, but not to.

Her friend is farther off than she had thought. From her window it had seemed as if by stretching out her hands she might with her finger-tips have touched the great, glancing silver shield. But the nearer she approaches to it, the more its white glory seems to recede. She feels its cool and bracing breath upon her face, but itself she does not reach.

Whether it is the sea-air, or the skimped supper overnight, or only the healthy working order in which her young organs are, but she suddenly becomes aware of being inexpressibly hungry, and, after having walked half a mile or so, turns back in the hope of at length finding the household aroused.

As she reaches the gate again the hospital clock beats the light air with nine loud, deliberate strokes. They must be up by now. Yes, it is clear that in the interval of her absence some one has risen, though no one is visible, for the hall-door is unlocked; but on peeping into the dining-room she is dispirited at seeing no smallest sign of coming breakfast; only a depressingly dingy baize table-cloth, and a general impression of crumbs. She goes out again into the garden, and tries to recollect when, at what distant epoch of her life, she ever felt so hungry before. Oh, if the daffodils and the polyanthuses were but eatable!

As she wanders disconsolately about she hears after a while a window thrown up. Diana, slightly dressed in night-attire, looks sleepily out. Can it be called Diana?—Diana without any of her distinguishing features; Diana without her sausage frisettes, without her piled false hair, without the plumed and flowered abomination of her hat! Diana, as God made her; not as Helmsley fashions, as trolloping curls, as cheap, loud clothes—as, in short, the desire to shine in the eyes of the 170th, have made her!

It would never have struck Joan as possible overnight that Diana could be a pretty girl. It comes upon her now with the force of a surprise that she is one. A little curly head; young dewy eyes full of color and light; pinky cheeks; red lips made for kisses and laughter. The beauty of a little dairy-maid indeed, but still beauty. It is difficult to look vulgar when one is very young, not inordinately fat, and when one has done nothing disfiguring to one's self. In her night-gown, with her blowzed hair tumbling into her sleepy eyes, Diana is not vulgar.

"You out!" she cries, in a drowsy voice, wherein surprise struggles with departing slumber. "Why on earth did you get up so early? is not the day long enough in all conscience?"

"I never can sleep after eight o'clock," answers Joan, half apologetically; "and there is no use in staying in bed when one is wide awake, is there?"

"I do not know" (indistinctly, with a yawn). "I think it is better than being up, when there is nothing to do."

A pause. Diana leans her arms on the sill, and looks aimlessly out at the wakeful flowers and the preoccupied bees.

"Is your sis—is Arabella up?" asks Joan, with a small, vain hope that one of the household may be up and stirring.

Diana laughs, showing many neat little white teeth.

"Up! she is not awake!—Bell!" (turning toward the inside of the room, and raising her voice), "Joan wants to know are you up yet? Joan is up and dressed, and out; you must get up! it is your week for making tea! if you do not get up, I shall come and shake you!"

But not even this threat has any effect. Diana turns again to the window, replaces her arms on the sill, and shaking her head:

"'Tis the voice of the sluggard; I heard her complain,
You have waked me too soon; let me slumber again'—

she says, with a laugh; "she will not be down for a couple of hours."

"Nor you either?" says Joan, with a sinking heart; "do you mean to go to bed again too?"

"I did," answers Diana, lazily, twisting one lock of her rough hair round her finger; "but I will not now, if you had rather that I did not. Have you any idea what time it is?"

"It must be a quarter-past nine."

"Is that all?" (extending her arms, throwing back her head, and opening her mouth in a gigantic stretch and yawn). "I hoped that it was ten, at least; I always think that there are just twice too many hours in the day, do not you? unless the band plays, or something is going on up at the barracks; but" (with a heavy sigh) "to-day there is nothing—positively nothing!" Joan is silent. To be a whole day without soldiers is to her a new form of suffering, and one for which in all her pharmacy there is no remedy. "But to be sure your boxes will come to-day," continues Diana with a livelier air, rousing herself from the pensive strain of thought into which she has fallen; "that will give us something to do; it will take a long time, no doubt, to examine all your things."

Joan swallows a sigh, and strangles a shudder.

"I dare say it will!"

"Maybe they will be here quite early," resumes the girl, now thoroughly awakened; "then I will dress at once; I do not take long when once I set about it; Bell says twenty minutes—I say a quarter of an hour; and you know it does not matter how untidy I am to-day, as no one will see me."

Joan shudders outright this time, and does not try to strangle it, as Miss Diana thus makes herself the naïve exponent of this doctrine of home slatternliness and out-door finery.

"You did not see any sign of breakfast, I suppose," says Diana, presently; happily unconscious of the effect her words have produced; "nothing laid?"

"Nothing!"

"I thought not; there never is; go into the dining-room and ring for breakfast; go on ringing till she comes!"

Joan obeys with alacrity. The hope of food, however distant, gives wings to her feet. The dining-room bell is broken. The rope is lying curled like a shabby snake on the floor. Not liking to take any further measures without directions, she returns to the garden to announce to her cousin her ill success.

She finds her still yawning at the morning sun and the flowers in exceeding dishabille.

"Broken, is it?—oh, so it is! Billy Jackson did it on Wednesday, when two of them came to luncheon here. Then go to the swing-door and call! go on calling till she answers! she very often pretends not to hear."

Joan does as she is bid, and repairs to the indicated swing-door, where she stands and calls "Sarah!" several times without any apparent result. She hears

indeed the sound of voices in colloquy or altercation in some not distant region, but answer comes there none.

The Moberley parlor-maid has evidently laid to heart Swift's "Directions to Servants," and especially this one: "Never come till you have been called three or four times, for none but dogs will come at the first whistle, and when the master calls 'Who's there?' nobody is bound to come, for 'Who's there?' is nobody's name."

But, at length, one last, despairing cry, hunger-prompted, and uttered in a louder key than Joan has ever expected to hear herself employ, evokes a spirit from the kitchen. A pert-faced, black-handed young creature, with a disordered coiffure nearly as big as her mistresses', answers the oft-repeated summons, and having received with a sulky surprise Joan's request for speedy breakfast, mildly yet firmly preferred, retires a good deal more quickly than she came.

## CHAPTER VI.

The family is assembled at length, Di having successfully removed or concealed nearly all traces of the beauty that God has given her. She has, indeed, been unable to do away with her eyes, or make them look as underbred as the rest of her. They still shine and laugh out of her disfigured face. She has, however, violet-powdered her fresh cheeks, piled her hair to more than its pristine height and bulk, and trailed her spurious curls to even greater length than on the previous evening. The dew has apparently taken every morsel of curl out of them; and, as she is pretty sure to see no one to-day, Diana has not thought it worth while to recurl them.

They therefore wander in perfectly straight and lustreless disorder down her back. Nor has her sister had less prosperity in the task of self-disfigurement. Her labor has indeed been less, as she has had less original beauty to spoil.

Daylight is no kinder to Mrs. Moberley than it has already been to her furniture and her daughters. She looks, if possible, fatter and hotter than ever; nor do the starting seams of her morning-gown, nor the easy negligence with which her cap sits crookedly upon her head, greatly enhance the attractiveness of her appearance. It is only a Lifeguardsman to whom it is becoming to have his cap set on awry.

She has been holding Joan's most reluctant hand for full five minutes, and staring intently with a fat pathos into her face, as she tries to dig out from among her features a resemblance to some member, alive or dead, of her own family. She is interrupted in her hopeless search by Diana, who strikes in brusquely:

"By-the-by, did the bed fall down with you last night? I forgot to ask you: it does sometimes; it did once with me. I think its legs are weak; I was so frightened; I thought it was the Last Day; that was why we put it in the spare-room."

"Nonsense, Di!" cries Mrs. Moberley, peevishly; "do not frighten the girl!—Perhaps" (turning to Joan) "it might not bear a very heavy person—I dare say that it would not; but it will never break down with such a light weight as you."

"I should not think that she was much lighter than I am," says Diana, contradictiously, measuring Joan with an appraising eye, "for, though of course she is much slighter, she is twice as tall, and it comes to the same thing—hurrah! there is breakfast at last! I hear Sarah clattering the plates."

Joan is very thankful for any diversion which removes six eyes from her person, and doubly thankful that the diversion should be in the shape of food. A move is made toward the dining-room, which is just across the narrow passage.

As she steps over the threshold, Bell cries out in a warning voice:

"Take care, Joan! the big hole in the carpet is just there; it very nearly tripped up Micky last Christmas-day."

Joan starts, stumbles, and by catching at the door-post recovers herself.

"If it is of such long standing," she says, with an astonished laugh, "why does not some one mend it?"

"Oh, I do not know," replies the girl, indifferently. "I suppose that Sarah has no time; and, after all, it does no great harm when one remembers where it is; and the dogs like it."

Such reasoning is unanswerable, as Joan feels; and so she takes her seat in silence at the social board. Before she had entered the room, Joan had credited herself with an appetite to which any food short of tripe or haggis would be welcome. She had said to herself reassuringly that they are not likely to have tripe for breakfast. She had pictured herself as pasturing with relish on all manner of plain and homely food, thick bread-and-scrape, porridge, perhaps treacle. Yes, she would not despise even treacle. But the first glance that she casts on the table arrangements robs her at once of half her appetite—a rumpled table-cloth, rich in yesterday's stains; a dull teapot; dim spoons; cups all cracked more or less, mostly more; and not a flower! Not one of all the thousand primroses that are palely smiling from every hedge-row! Treacle! porridge! Who could eat treacle or porridge on such a table-cloth?

Her meditations are interrupted by the sound of the two girls' voices, raised in recriminatory dialogue. They are wrangling as to who shall make the tea, or rather who shall not make it, for it is clearly an unpopular office.

After a few moments of argument of "you-are-another" nature, during which no approach is apparently made to a decision, Joan's soft voice strikes in, or rather steals in, between the shrill sharpness of those of the two combatants:

"If you like I will make tea; I am considered" (with a faint smile) "rather a good tea-maker; I always used to make it at—at—Dering."

As she speaks, the breakfast-room at Dering rises before her mind's eye: the breakfast-table in all the loveliness of spotless cleanliness, brilliantly-polished old silver, and airy china; the sideboard temptingly spread; the wealth of delicate flowers; the kind and courteous old man who always greeted her so lovingly; the pleasant, well-bred guests.

Ah! one must not think of these things; one must try to persuade one's self that one has always flourished at Portland Villa, among dirt, pewter, and cracks. Her offer is accepted with effusive gratitude, and she takes her place at the head of the board.

"Take care of the lid of the teapot," says Bell, as a parting injunction; "the hinge is broken, so it is loose, and if you are not careful to pour very slowly, it tumbles into the cups and upsets them."

"And is it never to be mended either?" asks Joan, with a laugh that tries to be playful, but only succeeds in being sad. "Do the dogs like it too?"

Joan's motive for her proposal has been chiefly good-nature, but there has also been in it a grain of self-interest. Behind the urn she will be less observed—less compelled to eat. But here she is mistaken. Diana, whose eyes are apparently as sharp as they are clear and shining, detects the emptiness of her plate, and the idleness of her jaws.

"Why, Joan, you are eating nothing!" she cries in a high key of surprise, "positively nothing!—have some beef?" indicating a dish wherein appetizingly repose some thick slices of meat, lavishly daubed with all but raw mustard, and which, apparently, is the nearest approach to a grill that the Moberley *chef* can effect. "No? Some broiled ham, then? No? I see"—[illegible] color deepening

the rose-tints in her fresh face, and a tone of mortification in her voice—"hungry as you are, you can't stand our food"—in a lowered voice—"and I do not wonder."

"Indeed you are mistaken," cries Joan, now thoroughly distressed, reddening till the tears come into her blue eyes, with a vexed scarlet that outflames even her cousin's, and ready to volunteer to eat any abomination that can be offered to her. "If you will let me I will change my mind. Yes, I will have some—some—beef, please" (looking anxiously from one dish to the other to see whose contents she will be most likely to be able to swallow). "Not very much—only a little."

It is on her plate now, and they are all looking at her. But the effort is vain. The too plenteous mustard makes her sneeze and cry, the great wedges of coarse meat choke her.

"You cannot manage it?" asks Diana, in a disappointed key, after watching the ill-success of her guest's endeavors with an intent interest. "I was afraid that you would not, but" (looking at her with round childish eyes, full of concern and apprehension) "what will you do all the time that you are living with us? It is" (glancing ruefully at the untempting dainties)—"it is never any better than this—you will starve."

"There is not much fear of that!" replies Joan, smiling faintly, though indeed the very same idea has just been presenting itself before her own mind's eye. "But to tell the truth, I do not think that I am quite so hungry as I imagined; at least more bread-and-butter hungry than anything else."

"Give it to the dogs," said Mrs. Moberley placidly, not disquieting herself much as to any freaks of appetite displayed by her niece.—"Here, Mr. Brown, you are the one who do not mind mustard! hi, along!"

Mr. Brown is on the other side of the table, standing on his hind-legs, with his fore-paws on the cloth, but, on hearing himself addressed, drops down on all-fours again, and rushes round the table in a stormy gallop. Too well he knows the manners of his brothers and sisters to give them any chance of interposing between him and his inheritance. Joan loves dogs, however noisy, rude, and greedy they may be; she loves them all, and at the present moment she is also deeply grateful to Mr. Brown for relieving her of her beef. So she stoops down and pats his smooth head.

"He is very like a dog belonging to a friend of mine," she says; "by-the-by, I think he is an acquaintance of yours; I mean not the dog, but the man. I think—I am almost sure that he said he knew you."

A light pink colors her cheeks as she says these last words, a tint called up by the recollection of the way in which Wolferstan had alluded to his knowledge of her aunt.

"What regiment was he in?" asks Bell, to whom "man" and "soldier" are synonymous terms. "When was he quartered here? The 7th were here last, and before them the 35th, and before them the 88th—"

"He never could have been quartered here," replies Joan, "because he is in the Guards, but I believe that he lives near here—at least his people do; his name is Wolferstan; do you know any such person?"

She is looking from one to the other of the three faces round her, and as she mentions the name of Wolferstan a ray of intelligence and recognition illumines them all.

"He said he knew us?" asks Diana in a tone of surprise and semi-awe; "he must have meant by sight."

"Nonsense, Di!" cries her mother, tartly; "he does know me quite well. He always takes off his hat to me whenever he meets me in Helmsley!"

"Is not he stylish-looking?" cries Bell, enthusiastically; "he looks so nice

in church! He looks about him a good deal during the prayers, but he generally goes to sleep in the sermon, and then one can see what a length his eye-lashes are!"

"His father was a very *distanggy*-looking man, when first I came here," says Mrs. Moberley, pensively, "though no one would believe it now to look at him; he is quite silly, poor old gentleman, and has to go about in a wheeled-chair, with his valet to blow his nose for him!"

"His mother is a made-up old Jezebel!" cries Bell, acrimoniously. "Every year her hair is a different color; she drives past us sometimes in the road, and looks at us as if we were the dirt under her feet."

"And all because she is an Honorable, I suppose," says Mrs. Moberley, shaking her head; "and, after all, it is the lowest thing that you can be in the peerage, without being nothing at all."

"And so you know young Wolferstan?" says Diana, with an expression of envious interest in her eyes. "Anthony Wolferstan—is not it a lovely name? Do you mean that you know him really—to talk to?"

Joan laughs a little. "Is that so surprising? Yes, I know him rather well; he used to stay at a house in our neighborhood, and I have often met him in London, and once he spent a week with us last winter, for some theatricals."

"Spent a week with you!" echoes Bell, in a voice of astonishment and awe; "then I suppose you must have been quite among the county people."

Joan laughs, but most uncomfortably, and involuntarily draws up her white throat.

"I never looked at it in that light before," she says, in rather a lower key; "but now I come to think of it—yes, I suppose we were."

"Well, we are not, you know," cries Diana, with a fierce honesty, while a sea of ingenuous scarlet washes her cheeks at the confession. "I need n we do not look much like it, do we? We know hardly any one nice except the officers, and perhaps you would not think them nice; I believe that the county people do not take much notice of them; Micky dined at the Abbey—that is the Wolferstan's—once, when first he came, but they have never asked him again."

"He would not go if they did," says Mrs. Moberley, with dignity; "he has said so often and often; he says he never was at such a dull set-out in his life, and that they did not give him half enough to drink."

Diana shakes her head in a manner that expresses her doubts of Mr. Brand's fortitude in rebutting the proffered civilities of the Abbey; but she is wisely silent.

"I am not sorry that Joan is so intimate with young Wolferstan," remarks Joan's aunt, a moment later, "because she will be able to introduce him to you, girls, at one of the balls, and, as likely as not, he will give you each a dance; they were all at the dispensary ball last year, and I remember thinking that he looked as if he would like to know you."

"Then what hindered him?" says Diana, dryly. "I am sure that we were willing enough."

"He was too much taken up with that lady in sulphur-color and sapphires, who came with their party," says Bell, regretfully.

"I never see him that he is not going on at a great rate with some one or other, and I always wish that I were the person," says Diana, with a heart-felt sigh. —"Had he a very bad name in your neighborhood, Joan?"

Joan's eyes are down-drooped toward her plate.

"I believe that he was considered a flirt," she says, slowly, and rather unwillingly.

"What wicked eyes he has!" says Bell, with zest; "he would be nothing without his eyes."

"We are not badly off for balls in the winter, Joan," strikes in Mrs. Moberley,

complacently, at this point—"not for a country place; there is always the dispensary, and the bachelors', and half a dozen private ones, counting carpet and negus things; and then there is always something going on at the barracks—always!—they, at least, are determined that Helmsley shall not go to sleep if they can help it."

"What should we do without them?" sighs Bell, affectionately.—"Once, Joan, there was a talk of building barracks at Churton, and moving them from here. I do not think that I ever was so miserable in my life, and Diana was nearly as bad; but we should not have staid here; we should have underlet the house; mother was already talking about it—"

"And *followed* them?" cries Joan, with an irrepressible astonishment and disgust; "why, you might as well be *vivandières* at once!"

"One might easily be a worse thing!" says Bell, pettishly; "but I never said anything about following them; I only said that we should have left this place."

"It is very difficult to do without military society when you have been used to it all your life," says Mrs. Moberley, rather pompously; "these children have every right to be fond of the army; their father was a military man!"

"He was an army doctor!" cries Diana, with her apparently ungovernable honesty.

"I never denied that he was a medical man," retorts Mrs. Moberley, with exasperation; "but he was in the army all the same!"

"Nobody thinks anything of the doctors," persists Diana, resolutely; "we never do: which of the girls cares to dance with Dr. Slop?"

"They rank the same as the other officers, which you know as well as I do," rejoins Mrs. Moberley, with warmth; "and their uniform is much handsomer."

"They are not the same thing," reiterates Diana, doggedly; "and whenever I hear you telling people that papa was a military man, I always explain, and I always shall explain, that he was only the doctor!"

## CHAPTER VII.

THERE is no reason why an argument of this kind should ever end. Neither disputant ever advances an inch toward an agreement with the other. Nothing will convince Mrs. Moberley that her late husband was not a military man, nor will Diana ever be persuaded that her father was of equal value with his brother officers in the eyes of the young ladies of his days. There is something very heating—not only figuratively but literally—in an argument. It makes not only the combatants but the on-lookers gasp.

Joan feels a physical oppression—a longing for air—when, a lull (caused, not by argument, but by want of breath) having at length come, the family read-journ to the drawing-room. Two or three trifling improvements have taken place in the aspect of this apartment since they left it. Most of the dust has been swept into corners or under chairs. The dead ashes have left the grate, the photograph-books and woolly mats on the table are set at right angles again, the antimacassars sit smoothly on the chair-backs, but the spider's banner still waves in airy freedom from the ceiling, undisturbed by mop or pope's-head, and the windows — on this loveliest, sweetest, freshest of April mornings — are shut. They are French windows, and look out toward the front to the meagre grass-plot and the road. Joan stands gazing longingly out through the dim panes at the fairly-colored, well-scented world outside, turning over in her mind whether she yet knows her cousins well enough to ask leave to admit a little air. Has not her aunt told her that it is Liberty Hall? Gaining courage from this recollection, she raises her fingers to the handle only to discover that there is no handle. Both

of them have gone, apparently, to look for the jug-spout, the gate-hinge, and the other missing etceteras of Portland Villa.

"Do you want to open the window?" says Diana, joining her. "Stay, I will get a pair of scissors; we always have to open them with scissors; mother's is the largest pair. The handles have been gone a long while; but the fact is, we owe a long bill to the locksmith, and we do not like to have him again till it is paid!"

They are open now, and the morning air, the noise of the blissful bees, the clean smell of the arabis float in all together. The dogs—they are all pugs, more or less—are out on the turf, employing themselves in different ways. Mr. Brown is digging violently and secretly in the corner of the flower-border, making the brown earth fly up into his own eyes, and over all his eager face, and Regy and Algy are rolling over each other in friendly battle on the sward. Regy has both paws round Algy's neck, and Algy has got a large and baggy piece of Regy's black cheek in his mouth. All the clear fine air is full of thrush-voices. I suppose that every April the birds say the same thing, but yet it seems as if each spring their music were bettered, their little trills more deftly done. Joan stands leaning against the door listening to them, and tapping with one foot on the sill.

"How close you are to the sea!" she says presently, turning her face in the direction of the great flood, and opening mouth and nostrils to inhale the pungency of the sea-wind. "I suppose that you are down there every day?"

Diana shakes her head.

"Not often; sometimes we go down to bathe if the tide suits, but not often, it is too expensive; what with machine and dresses, it comes to a shilling every time!"

"And you never walk on the shore?"

"Never," answers Bell, joining in the conversation; "no one does; one never meets any of them—I mean, any one there! If there were a pier and the band played it would be different; but as it is, there is nothing—absolutely nothing—but sand and cockle-shells."

"Micky sometimes takes his big Newfoundland down for a swim," says Diana, pulling a bit of wallflower and holding it to Mr. Brown's nose, who, having dug his hole as deep as he wished, and disinterred half a dozen innocent bulbs, now makes one of the party. "He throws sticks in for him; it is so pretty to see him riding up and down on the waves, with his great black tail sweeping out behind him, like a feather. Dear old dog! Micky is going to give him to me by-and-by, when he goes away." She says the last four words in a lower, softer key, with her head turned aside, and under her ill-fitting pigeon-breasted gown her heart heaves in a sigh.

"*Another* dog?" says Joan, lifting her eyebrows. "Is he to be in-doors or out-of-doors?"

"In-doors, of course," answers Diana, indignantly. "I should as soon think of turning mother into the yard as of cooping up a dog there; and, after all, one more does not make much difference either way. If one has six, one may just as well have seven."

"We have gone on that principle ever since we had two," says Bell, with a laugh; "we shall get up to twenty in time."

"With all my heart," cries Diana, blithely; "for though they do not perhaps improve the furniture, they certainly are the light of the house."

As she speaks she jumps gayly down the steps, and, plumping down on the grass-plot, is instantly covered by the six pugs. Three get on her lap, one licks her nose, one mumbles her hand, and two worry the rosette on her shoe.

Joan, laughing, steps out after her; and only the consciousness of her new crape, and the unlikelihood of its ever being replaced, prevent her from joining in the fray.

"Would you like to come out for a

walk, Joan?" says Diana presently, lifting her sunshiny eyes to her cousin's face. "I think it would gratify the dogs!—Algy, if you do that once again, I shall pull your tail!—But, perhaps, if you have always been used to your carriage, you cannot walk."

"But I can, indeed," cries Joan, eagerly—"nobody better; often and often I have walked round the park at home."

"It will not fatigue you to walk round the park here," says Diana, a little sarcastically, eying her shabby domain; "but if you could condescend to a high-road—"

"We had better take sun-shades!" says Bell with alacrity; "there is not much shade, and there is a good deal of dust; but when once you get there the shops are really very good; and the morning is not a bad time either: many of the officers' wives cater for themselves, and one is pretty sure to see somebody!"

"Are we going to the town?" with an accent of unconcealable disappointment, while her thoughts revert to the unlovely tract passed last night — the brick-fields, the scaffolding-poles, the hospital. "Must we?"

There is a little silence.

Diana has bent her head over the dogs.

Bell's jaw has lengthened. "It is the only road where one ever has a chance of seeing any one," she says, peevishly.

Diana looks up again. If there was any cloud on her face it is certainly gone again; the blue sky above is not clearer or merrier. "You would like to go to the sea?" she says, good-temperedly; "well, we will!—the dogs love a game with the sea-gulls, and they always think that they are going to catch them!"

Ten minutes later they set off. Their party, however, is reduced by one. Bell stays at home. It is one thing to brave the sun-shafts and the dust-clouds for the certainty of shops and the hope of officers; but quite another thing to expose one's self to these disagreeables merely for the sake of sand and cockle-shells. But, after all, the sunbeams shine to stroke, not to smite, and they come in for but little dust, as their way lies for the most part across fields—fields where the future harvest is laughing in green infancy; where the riotous sap is racing along the veins of the hedge-row May-bushes; fields where the meadow-grass, forgetting its wintry pallor, is beginning to put on again its strength and sweetness.

Joan's soul has gone out of her body—away from her own tame and meagre lot, and is frolicking in the spring world, when it is suddenly recalled by the voice of Diana, in grave and earnest inquiry:

"Joan, do you like my hat?"

Joan brings back her attention as quickly as she can, from Nature to art, and recalls her eyes from the live lark—the speck of loud music quivering miles above her head—to the dead bird-of-paradise, from whose body a mighty tail has been reft—a tail that rears itself aloft and sweeps away behind—to adorn her cousin's coiffure.

As she does not at once answer (at least in words), Diana resumes in a rather disappointed voice, but still with confidence: "It must be all right, for it came from Paris—Micky brought it me the other day; people in Helmsley laugh at it a good deal—so I am told; but Helmsley fashions are always a year behind London, and London, they say, is a year behind Paris; and so, no doubt, it will come here in time, and then people will see that I have been right all along."

"I was in Paris not long ago," says Joan, slowly, while her eye roves with an expression of deep distrust over her cousin's head, "but I do not think that I saw anything very like it. Are you sure that it came from Paris?"

"He said so," replies Diana, in a crestfallen voice; "and I do not think that he would tell an untruth about it."

"Of course not!" answers Joan, reflecting that in Paris, no less than in other cities, you may no doubt find abominable

head-gears, if you only go to the right places for them.

A little pause.

"You do not like it, then?" asks Diana, diffidently, with a sound of not distant tears in her voice. "I had rather that you would tell the truth."

"I think it is very—very—very—remarkable," answers Joan, distressed, and floundering about in search of an adjective which shall be moderately truthful, and not too damnatory. "Has Bell one like it? Did he give her one, too?"

"Oh, dear, no!" rejoins the other, recovering her alacrity of tone; "he has never given her anything—he is not her friend. Bobby Butler gave her a jacket last winter—a very handsome one—black velvet and sable tails. Bobby paid her a great deal of attention, he always asked her to dance first, and sometimes took her down to supper. Many people thought that he would come out with a proposal some fine day, but he never did; he went away instead!"

Miss Dering makes no audible comment on this piece of news, but to her own heart she says, "Wise Bobby."

"He said very disagreeable things about us after he went," pursues Diana, gravely; "laughing at us, you know, and altogether not kind! When we heard it I wanted her to send him the jacket back again. Would not you have sent it back?"

"I should never have taken it in the first instance," answers Joan, drawing up her little head, while her cheeks redden, and her breath quickens. Diana opens her large eyes.

"Would not you?" she says, in a surprised tone; "but they were *real* sable tails, you know—not mock!—well—it was no use! she would not send it back!"

Joan groans a little.

"And what else have they given you?" she says, in a tone out of which she in vain tries to keep the indignant contempt; "do they dress you altogether?"

"Do you mean that we ought not to take presents?" asks Diana, gazing with a little consternation, and a good deal of astonishment at her cousin's lifted head and flushed cheeks; "but, you know, we do not ask for them; they offer them to us, and" (rather faltering) "when one is very badly off, and has very few clothes of one's own, and is fond of being a little smart, it is so hard to refuse!"

Joan is silent; a silence of anything but acquiescence, as Diana feels.

"I do not want them to give me anything expensive or valuable," she goes on, after a moment or two, in a rather humiliated tone. "I am sure it is the last thing I wish, that Micky should give me a jacket like Bell's, as he sometimes talks of doing; for I do not think he is well off, and I am sure he could not afford it; but a hat!—that could not ruin him, I thought, and it was a great matter to me!"

There is such a wistfulness in her tone as she makes this last appeal, that Joan feels compelled to smile, but it is the smile of a young Spartan.

"I would sooner have gone without a hat!" she says, emphatically; "or, indeed, without a head!"

They walk on in an uncomfortable silence; the one irritated and galled, the other crestfallen and humbled. But, before long, the warm shining of the sun, the lark's solo, and the sound of the plash and plunge of the morning waves that they are nearing, smooth the creases out of Miss Dering's temper, and she speaks again; changing, this time, the obnoxious theme, though not getting as far from it as she perhaps imagines.

"What odd names your dogs have! Algy, Regy, Charlie, Mr. Brown, Willy. They are not like dogs' names!"

"No, they are not," replies Diana, meekly; "and indeed they are not dogs' names; we christened them after—after—people!"

"After men you know?" (lifting her eyebrows again a little).

"After men in different regiments that have been here," says Diana, turning her head half away, and looking foolish; "men that were—were—friends of ours. Algy was in the 88th, Regy was in the 35th, Willy was in the 10th, Charlie—I forget what Charlie was in!—it is so long ago! he is the eldest of the whole lot."

"And Mr. Brown?" asks Joan, laughing against her will.

"Oh! Mr. Brown," replies Diana, rather confused; "well, he used to be Bobby, after Bobby Butler; but when he behaved so badly to Bell, we thought we would not call him Bobby any more, because it only reminded us; so we rechristened him after Mr. Brown, who was in the same regiment; he hardly knows his name yet."

"But why *Mr.* Brown?" inquires Joan, wondering; "why are you so much more respectful to him than to the others?"

"We knew him less," explains Diana, gravely; "we never were intimate with him, and he never would tell us what his Christian name was—I do not know why—so we had to call the dog Mr. Brown."

Joan laughs with a sincere though dismal mirth.

"And when Micky goes, will you christen another dog after him?" she asks.

"I do not know," replies Diana, rather shortly, turning her head about with an uneasy movement; "he is not gone yet: it will be time enough to think about that when he is."

They have reached the sea; have passed the loose sand-hills, where the dry grass scantly waves, and the blue sea-thistles blow; have lightly sprung over half a dozen runlets racing down to empty their little teacups of fresh, sweet water far into the salt and greedy sea, that takes all presents and says no "thank you" for them.

Now they stand side by side on a stretch of hard sand, on which the foot scarcely leaves a print, and which—were the day sulky and dull—would be called brown, but now are glistening and dazzling with unquestioned gold. Is it not a wealthy day?—a silver sea breaking on golden sands, and both arched by a sapphire sky.

The sea is in its civilest humor. With the meekest air, the blandest, sleepiest, most lulling sound, it comes creaming in; deceitfully stealing round their feet as they stand, and coolly fondling them. To-day it is too gentle even to laugh; only it smiles up to the sun, with unnumbered dimples.

"'I see the deep's untrampled floor
With green and purple sea-weed strown,'"

says Joan, half under her breath, stooping to pick up a length of sea-bloom that, drenched and emerald-colored, has just drifted to her feet; then turning with wondering lips and kindling eyes to Diana:

"And you never come here? you do not like it?"

"I like it well enough," replies Diana, apologetically, shading her eyes with her hand from the sun-and-sea dazzle.—"Look!" (pointing to a little puff and a small tail of smoke away on the horizon), "there is a steamer! is not it tantalizing? they never come any nearer than that: it would be so pleasant if they would come quite close, and one could see who was on board!—Yes" (resuming the thread of her discourse), "I like it well enough, as I said; but you see it is not only I; there are two of us, you know, and Bell hates it; she does not care to walk anywhere much except on the Helmsley road, and I must own that one does see six carriages there of a day, for one that one sees anywhere else."

Joan shrugs her shoulders, and flings back her green weed, which, limply clinging round her fingers, has lost half its native beauty, into a rippling wave that comes to fetch it, and on which it floats home again with recovered loveliness.

"It is not quite all Bell's fault either," resumes Diana presently, with an uncomfortable sense of having slightly misrepresented things, and laid a heavier burden on her sister's shoulders than they quite deserve to bear. "I like the Helmsley road, too; I like going where one is most likely to see people, too; but I do not dislike the sea" (looking round with a tolerant air on the august flood before her); "if it were only I, I should most likely come here a good deal oftener; and I am rather fond of sea-things. Once I kept a sea-anemone in my wash-hand-basin for a fortnight, and fed it with raw beef."

Joan laughs a little at this naïve instance of love for the wonders of the deep, and then stoops down pensively to pull the ear of Mr. Brown, who, either through having more common-sense or being more incumbered with fat than his brothers, has desisted earlier from the sea-gull chase, and now sits on the hard sand, with his heart beating very fast, and slobbering a good deal as his eyes follow his late quarry with an expression which seems to say that the ways of sea-gulls—luring on an honest dog only to delude him—are not according to his ideas of what the manners of a modest bird should be.

"He *is* like young Wolferstan's dog, now you mention it," says Diana, stooping too, and stroking the fine velvet of his other ear; "and yet they say that he gave five-and-twenty guineas for his, and we did not give five-and-twenty pence for you—did we, Mr. Brown?—By-the-by, Joan" (with quickened tone and brightened eyes), "we may as well go home by the Abbey, may not we? as you know him, you would like to see the place where he lives, and it is not at all out of our way."

"If you like," answers Joan, in rather a melancholy tone. "Yes, certainly! I suppose that there is no fear of meeting any of them!—that they are all safe away in London?"

"Yes," says Diana, heaving a deep sigh, "safe away in London! lucky people!—as regularly as the spring comes round, off they go! What would they say to me, who have never been to London in my life? Bell was there once, but she did not like it; she said it made her feel so small. I do not think I should mind that—I mean, I am used to it; even here in Helmsley, I never feel very large!"

They lapse into silence. The sun has mounted higher. Now that they have left the breeze-beaten shore, and the cool fields, and are tramping along a glaring, dusty high-road, he smites on their heads with less kindness and more force. Physical discomfort deepens the gloom of Joan's reflections.

"Have we much farther to go?" she says after a while, in a rather disconsolate voice, trailing one foot languidly after another, in the powdery dust.

"We are just there," answers Diana, cheerfully; "there are the gates, with their wolf crest on them!—oh, how thirsty I am! I will ask the lodge-woman for a glass of water, and then we can have a chat with her, and she will tell us all about them—when they are coming down."

They have reached the gates; the high and solid stone posts, surmounted by great stone balls, and on each of which a wolf's head, with fanged jaws, is forever grinning in stone. The lodge-keeper is apparently out. The lodge-door is shut. Evidently, in the absence of the family, she is taking a holiday from her duties. The hoped-for information about the family is therefore not forthcoming.

"One can get a capital view of the house if one puts one's head far enough through," says Diana, thrusting her hot cheeks between the cool iron bars of the gate, and twisting her neck. "Later on in the year, when the scarlet geraniums are in flower, one can see them quite plainly; I fancy they have a lovely garden."

"Have you never been inside?" asks Joan, in surprise.

"Never; it is not a show-place, and you know we do not know them; mother says" (in a tone of contempt) "that Colonel Wolferstan knows her, but I do not call it knowing a person to say 'Good-morning, Mrs. Moberley! fine day!' if he happens to meet her; it is my belief that he would not know her even by sight, only that she is so remarkable-looking it is difficult to forget her when once you have seen her."

## CHAPTER VIII.

It is an hour later. They are at home again.

"At what time do you dine?" asks Joan, languidly, as a horrible suspicion that a lengthy, steaming, mid-day dinner is henceforth to be her portion, dawns on her mind.

Not even the sight, the sound, the smell, or the taste of the sea has been able to raise Miss Dering's spirits. Whatever small measure of cheerfulness and buoyancy they inspired has been counteracted by her scanty view through the harshly-closed gates of Wolferstan's home. It seems to her a grim augury of the way in which, from this time onward, she will make acquaintance with all fair and pleasant things. She will peep at them distantly through iron bars.

"At what hour do we dine?" repeats Diana, reflectively; "well, to tell you the truth, that is a fact at which I have never yet arrived: all I know is, that it is never the same two days together; sometimes the butcher does not bring the meat, sometimes the oven will not heat, sometimes the kitchen clock stops, sometimes Sarah forgets to lay the cloth; however, it is generally somewhere between one and three, though I have known it half-past twelve, and I have known it four; however, when there is nothing to do all day" (yawning), "it does not much matter if you are hungry, as indeed you have every right to be, let me fetch you a bit of bread; I know that there is bread, for I saw the baker's cart drive away five minutes ago."

But Joan is not hungry. Not even when, by-and-by, seated at the dinner-table, she watches Mrs. Moberley sawing asunder a gigantic fowl, which has evidently spent a long life in walking, so preternaturally are the muscles of his legs developed: a mammoth bird, flanked by the biggest ham that ever scratched itself in life against a post.

"You might ride to York on this knife!" observes Mrs. Moberley, desisting, heated and baffled, from her efforts, and eying her implement with an exasperated air. "I do not know what has come to the knives of late; one cannot tell the backs from the blades."

"Micky has spoilt most of our knives cutting soda-water wires with them," says Bell, gravely; "he ought to give us a new set when he goes away, and so I shall tell him."

"Do not!" cries Diana, hastily, and reddening; "for Heaven's sake do not let us try to get anything more out of them!"

"Talking of soda-water," says Mrs. Moberley, slowly, in the intervals of wrestling with the mighty pinion before her, "reminds me that, whether you like it or not, girls, into Helmsley you must go this afternoon; as I told you last night, we are quite out of soda-water, and the man has not brought the beer!"

"I must give my curl a turn with the irons, then," says Diana, pulling out her long, trolloping lock to its full length, and pensively regarding it; "it was bad enough this morning, but the sea-air has taken out what little remnant of curl was left in it."

"I have half a mind to go with you myself, girls," says Mrs. Moberley, friskily; "that is, if you will let me take my time and not run me off my legs; why should not we make an afternoon of it—it is a poor heart that never rejoices—and take

Joan round by the barracks and the club-room?"

But against this plan for her entertainment Joan rises in mild but resolute revolt. Whether she will ever be able to brace her nerves enough to enable her to let herself be hawked about among the 170th regiment has yet to be decided. At present she is at some distance from that consummation.

"Very well, my dear, very well!" replies her aunt, rather offended; "say no more about it—say no more—none in this house are ever obliged to do anything that is disagreeable to them: as I told you when you came, it is Liberty Hall, Joan—Liberty Hall!"

So she sees them go without her. It is some time before they are really off, as—apart from the matter of the curling-irons—an entire change of costume is apparently necessary. At length they are ready; the girls with their cuffs well pulled down over their knuckles, their dresses freely opened at the throat, their necks abundantly hung with lockets, and their hair freshly frizzed—newly towzled.

"I do not care how many people we meet now," says Bell, exultantly, drawing on a pair of tight gloves; "the more the better! Come along, Di!"

But Diana is apparently not quite so fully convinced of the unexceptionableness of her appearance as is her sister. She has glanced furtively at Joan to see what expression her eyes wear, and, going over to her, has said brusquely, with uncomfortably red cheeks:

"I see that you think we have overdone it; we always do." Then, not waiting for the unready answer: "Do not be more bored than you can help while we are away!"—she goes on moving toward the door, and looking back rather wistfully from it—"there is a novel lying about somewhere. I brought it from the library the other day; there is a bit missing from the third volume, but one can give a good guess what it is about; where has it gone to, I wonder?" (glancing round the room); "I do not see it anywhere—do you?"

"Most likely the dogs have got hold of it," says Mrs. Moberley, placidly. "Mr. Brown is fond of a book."

"I saw a book in the laurel-tree this morning," suggests Joan, doubtfully; "could that have been it? it looked rather battered."

"Very likely," rejoins Diana, composedly; "most things in this house find their way sooner or later to the laurel-tree; well, you will know where to look for it if you want it!"

Now they are gone—not, however, before Bell again puts her head inside the door, to remark in a wheedling voice:

"Even if your boxes come you will not unpack them while we are away, will you?"

The house-door has banged behind them; they have passed down the drive, round the corner, out of sight. Joan turns from the window with a half smile on her lips at a last vision of Bell angrily fencing off Mr. Brown from her clean gown with her parasol. Then she takes out her watch, and, with her eyes on its face, makes a calculation. At Mrs. Moberley's rate of walking it will take them quite three-quarters of an hour to reach Helmsley, three-quarters of an hour to return. They will surely not spend less than an hour and a half there: three hours in all. She has therefore three good hours before her. Three hours for what? For reflection? In her present situation three minutes would be too much.

She walks slowly round the room, with her hands loosely folded behind her. Unsparingly she examines each of the details that make up so sordid a whole. She discovers half a dozen latent dust-heaps, a score of greater and lesser spiders'-webs, a variety of ink-stains on the table-cloth, and many rents in the chair-covers.

Then she returns to the window, and drawing up a chair to it, so as to feel all

the honeyed freshness of the air, sits down, and leaning her sleek head against the faded, woolly antimacassar, thinks. In dreary panorama all the incidents of her short stay, that yet seems so long, tread past before her mind's eye.

"I had no idea that I was so greedy," she says aloud, as her thoughts tarry involuntarily long at the breakfast which had been so difficult to get through. "Hitherto I have always thought that I had eaten to live; now I see that I must have lived to eat!"

She closes her eyes, and past, present, and future, walk solemnly by: the first all sunshiny gold, the second all drab, the third all ink. Two tears steal out from under her shut lids, but no sooner does she feel them on her cheek than she raises herself, and indignantly shakes them away.

"Is this my pluck?" she says, still speaking aloud, though in a low key; "the pluck of which I boasted even to him? Is this the way in which I had braced myself to meet my troubles? just because they are not of the kind I expected, are they to find me limp and puling like this? Just because I expected a stab, and have found pin-pricks instead? Oh! I would rather have been stabbed—stabbed deep! Any stab would have been better—anything would have been better!" she says, twisting her hands together and writhing at the thought of the daily, hourly, momently penance to which every tone of voice, every movement, every mode of thought of the Moberley family condemns, and will forever condemn, her. "Well" (rising again, and again beginning to walk about the room), "well! I suppose that none can pick and choose their afflictions. If I had had my choice I should have lived with gentlefolks, and they should have bullied me, they should have had next to no hair on their heads, and should never have mentioned a soldier." She laughs a little, and then, lapsing into deeper gravity, says presently, "God give me pluck to keep od heart and bear my pin-pricks!"

It is a real prayer, though, perhaps, not conventionally worded. Occupation of some kind she must have; but what? Her boxes not having yet arrived, none of her own resources are within reach. She looks rather hopelessly round the room—not to criticise this time, but to search. The sight of a work-basket disgorging tangled Berlin wools puts an idea into her head. Why not mend the hole in the dining-room carpet?

Joan has been taught stitching in all its branches, and, what is more, she loves it. She has never before, indeed, been set to mend carpets, but she has mended rents in other things, and, after all, it is only the application to a new purpose of old knowledge. In three minutes, armed with a darning-needle and a skein of wool, with her gown turned inside out and pinned round her, she is kneeling on the dusty carpet, her whole soul absorbed in the endeavor to make the ragged, straggly edges of the great rent approach each other.

There is something very soothing in work, especially handiwork. As Joan toils the blood runs to her head, it is true, but the bitterness goes out of her heart. A sense of amusement takes its place.

What if that very fine lady, her late maid, could see her now? What if any of her former friends? What if Wolferstan, arriving unexpectedly from London and coming to pay his promised visit, were to peep in through the window and see her. She looks up involuntarily, half expecting to meet his eyes smiling in upon her. But no! Through the casement—the wind has risen a little—she sees a blue-and-yellow tom-tit swinging to and fro, in airy jollity, on the topmost twig of the little sere cypress outside—that is all. So she resumes her task. After a while she straightens herself, and, sitting up again, speaks out loud:

"There is nothing more revolting than ingratitude," she says, emphatically; "they were ready to give me their very best—it is not their fault that their best

is so exceedingly bad. They were willing even to go shares with me in Micky." She laughs softly with a genuine mirth. "Well! I have no Micky to halve, it is true, but I can make as great a sacrifice; I will let them copy all my best gowns in red-and-yellow calico!"

Again she laughs; and so falls to work again. The yawning gap has already disappeared, and is replaced by a lattice-work. To and fro, along and across, quick and sure, the darning-needle goes.

There is still another hour's work before her. As she so thinks, the door-bell ringing clangs upon her ear. It cannot be that her cousins are returned already. It must be some one come to call.

"One of *them*, perhaps!" she says a little sarcastically; "who knows?—Micky himself? What a bitter disappointment it will be, when they come back and learn what they have lost!"

After a pause, and two more applications to the bell on the part of the visitor, Sarah is heard going to obey the summons. The door opens; there is a parley; it closes again. Sarah returns along the passage. What a heavy foot she has! How ponderously she treads!

Secure in the consciousness of not having a single acquaintance in Helmsley; sure of having neither part nor lot in the visitor, and confident, therefore, of remaining undisturbed, Joan has not taken the trouble to change her position, or lift her head. She is still kneeling, still darning, when a loud and palpably artificial "H'm!" uttered in an unmistakably masculine voice, makes her start violently and look hastily up. Even if Sarah could simulate a manly tread, it would be impossible for her or any other known parlor-maid to counterfeit such a voice.

A perfectly unknown man stands before her—a young man, and, judging by his appearance, an extremely healthy one; a young man, holding a hat in one hand and a stick in the other, and with a confident smile of extreme friendliness both on his lips and in his gay bold eyes.

"Mrs. Moberley is out," says Joan, rising quickly, but without hurry or discomfiture, from her lowly posture, and bending her head slightly in polite but grave salutation.

"And are the girls out too?" asks the young man, in a voice that fitly matches in depth and gruffness the sound of his introductory "H'm!" and preparing to deposit his hat and stick in the hall, with an evident intention of staying some time.

"My cousins are out!" answers Joan, with a slight but intentional accent on the first two words, and infusing a little more ice than before into her tone. "I suppose that Sarah must have misled you by the idea that they were at home?"

"No, she did not," replies the young man, nonchalantly; "she told me that they were out—that no one but you was at home; but I thought that—" He is looking full at her as he speaks—at the soft yet proud seriousness of her face—and something in it (he himself could not have told you what) makes him change the end of his sentence. He had meant to say—"I thought that I would come in and have a chat with you." He says instead—"I thought that I would come in and wait till their return! You know" (with a half-awkward, half-familiar laugh) "I am quite a tame cat here—in and out whenever I like."

"Yes?" in a rather more frozen key than before.

How tall she is! He had no idea, as she knelt, how tall she was. Both her cousins, both the Moberleys and he, had agreed that she should be a little woman; one can grow much more quickly intimate with a little woman. There is something rather confusing, even to a person who does not know what shyness is, in having a tall young vestal standing opposite to him, looking calmly at him with a grave and, as he feels, not admiring composure, and evidently expecting him to go. It is clear that she can have no idea who he is.

"As there is no one here to introduce us to each other," he says, with rather a nervous laugh, "I suppose we must introduce ourselves. I have no doubt that we have heard each other's name very often."

"I have not yet the pleasure of knowing what your name is," answers Joan, gravely.

She has unpinned her gown, and it now hangs in heavy, simple folds around her. She is still looking at him.

He wishes that she would look away. He laughs again more nervously, and also louder.

"If you have heard it half as often as I have heard yours, you have every right to be sick of it."

This remark does not seem to Miss Dering to require an answer, so she makes none.

"My name is Brand," he goes on, speaking fast and uneasily, while the naturally healthy tint of his cheek perceptibly deepens. "I think you must have heard them mention it. I am here most afternoons. I see a great deal of them."

"Yes."

A little silence. The tom-tit still swings and sways on his cypress twig; the rooks are sailing home toward the Abbey, Wolferstan's rooks sailing homeward through the placid sea of air; the shadows are beginning to grow.

"Do you expect them back soon?" says Mr. Brand presently, shifting restlessly from one foot to the other, and growing ever more and more uneasy under the cold shining of his companion's eyes. "Did they say, when they set off, how long they meant to be away?"

"Most of the afternoon, I think."

"And left you here all alone?"

"I preferred it."

"At all events they have lost no time in setting you to work," he says, with a brusque laugh, glancing at her late occupation, and trying, by a great effort, to resume his gayety and assurance.

To this observation Miss Dering vouchsafes no reply of any sort.

Another pause.

A lamb in the meadow over the road—a lamb that has evidently mislaid its mother—bleats in loud complaint.

"If you really think it worth while to wait for their return," says Joan, presently, with a rather severe intonation, "perhaps you will come into the drawing-room." As she speaks she leads the way across the narrow passage, and ushers in her unwelcome visitor. "I fear that you will find it tedious," she says, formally, "as I do not expect them back till six or seven. If you will excuse me, I will return to my work."

So saying, and again bowing slightly, she walks out of the room and shuts the door after her. Then repinning her gown, she kneels down again, and resettles to her toil. An amused smile passes over her features, that have lately been set in so austere a gravity.

"So this is Micky," she says to herself. "Well, like everything else, he is rather worse than I expected."

For some time absolute silence reigns. No sound whatever issues from the drawing-room. After a while, however, there is a noise as of some one walking about to and fro, up and down, in the confined space. Apparently time is beginning to hang on Mr. Brand's hands. Then the piano is opened, and sounds arise from it. It is very much out of tune; several of the upper notes are quite dumb, and Micky is but a poor performer. Apparently he is trying to pick out the "Dead March" in "Saul" with one finger on it. Thence he slides rather suddenly into "Take back the Heart that thou gavest," which he accompanies with his voice. Then he leaves off altogether. A few moments later he opens the door.

"Would you mind my leaving this open a little?" he asks, in a voice a good deal less confident and more respectful than that which he had at first employed; "it need not disturb you, and we might have a little conversation."

"Certainly, if you wish."

Having gained the permission, he leans against the door-post, with his legs crossed, and his hands in his pockets, but at first the little conversation does not seem forthcoming. At length, "It is wonderfully warm weather for the time of year," he says. He has evidently been searching among his *répertoire* of remarks for one warranted not to give offense, and has been unable to find anything less obvious than this.

"Yes."

"It is too good to last, I fear; we shall have the east wind back to-morrow, probably."

"Probably."

"Was there a good deal of east wind at your—where you came from?"

"A good deal."

A pause. Joan is aware that Mr. Brand's eyes are fastened immovably upon her; but, as he can see nothing but her tightly-coiled hair and the nape of her neck, she is not much concerned.

"If you will excuse my asking" (in a rather diffident voice), "are you really first-cousin to the Misses Moberley? I think I must have misunderstood, but I thought they said *first*."

"Yes, first."

"First-cousins are such near relations," pursues the young man, "next thing to being sisters."

"Not quite that," rejoins Joan, quickly, involuntarily raising herself, and looking up.

"But next step to it," repeats the other, persistently. "I suppose that your mother and Mrs. Moberley were sisters?"

"I suppose so," echoes Joan, dreamily, still sitting up, forgetting her work and Micky, and staring blankly before her, while the monstrousness of this proposition strikes her with fresh force and novelty; "I mean—yes—of course they were!"

"You take after your father's family, I suppose?"

"I suppose so" (rather shortly, with a thought that the conversation is growing undesirably personal, and resuming her needle).

Another silence; as far as Miss Dering is concerned, it may last forever; there is nothing embarrassing in an occupied silence, but to be totally idle, and as totally dumb, is confusing.

So Micky feels apparently, for he begins again: "Had you a long journey yesterday?"

"Rather long."

"Railway-traveling is very fatiguing, is not it?"

"Very."

"Not so bad as one of the old coaches, though, I dare say?"

"I dare say not."

"Particularly if you went inside?"

"Yes."

Again the lamb, the rooks, and the tom-tit, have all the talk to themselves. But Mr. Brand is not easily either baffled or silenced. After a few moments he begins again:

"The gi—I mean your cousins—are very good walkers."

"Are they?"

"Are you a good walker?"

"Pretty good."

"It is a—a—very healthy exercise."

"Yes."

"Not so healthy as riding, though, doctors tell you."

"No."

"Walking is fatigue without exercise, and riding is exercise without fatigue, they say, do not they?"

"I believe so."

"Your boxes are come!" cries a voice, loud and shrill with excitement, breaking in at this point, as Bell's face, hot with running, and reddened by pleasurable agitation, looks in like a very full-blown rose at the window—"at least they will be in two minutes; we passed the carrier's cart. I ran on to tell you; they quite fill it. Diana says she counted seven; what can you have in *seven* boxes?" She stops, out of breath; then,

catching sight of Mr. Brand: "Well, it never rains but it pours! you here?"

"I am here so very seldom that that is a most astonishing fact, is not it?" answers the young man, coolly advancing, with a languid air of completest, easiest intimacy, to meet his young friend.

Bell is in the house by now, and, having pulled off her hat, is fanning her heated cheeks with it. "Why, you told us that you were to be on guard all to-day!" she says, reproachfully.

"But you see I am not."

At the utter and almost contemptuous familiarity of his tone, Joan looks up in astonishment. Can this be the young man who, for the last half-hour, has been laboriously dragging up respectable truisms from the depths of his being, and diffidently presenting them to her?

But there is no anger on Bell's face, only a gratified mirth. "So you two have been making friends, I suppose?" she goes on, gayly; "it is rather late in the day to introduce you to each other, is not it? Have you been making friends?"

As she speaks she looks, smiling inquisitively, from one to the other. A little pause.

"Query? have we?" says the young man at length, with a laugh happily compounded of swagger and embarrassment.

But Joan affects to be deaf to the question, if it is one. She has walked to the window, and is looking out.

"Seven boxes," resumes Bell, returning to the subject which is uppermost in her thoughts; "what can you have in seven boxes? It will take us quite a whole day to go through them, will not it?"

"Quite," replies Joan, sighing.

. . . . . .

It is evening now. Mr. Brand has at length gone, and the candles are lit. "I never was so sure as you were, mother, that they would get on well," Bell is saying apropos of her cousin and Micky, as watches the latter's retreating figure lessening down the starlit road, and shaking her head. "Micky hates being on his P's and Q's; he likes girls with whom he can be quite at home, at once —who do not mind what he says to them; that is why he likes us so much, often and often he has said so."

"A left-handed compliment, is not it?" says Diana, with a rather bitter laugh. "It strikes me that most of our compliments are left-handed ones."

## CHAPTER IX.

Thus Joan has overlived one day of her new life. She has even begun upon another, for it is morning again. If she has overlived one she can overlive all. Probably one will be no better or worse than another. It is possible, indeed, that use may bring some slight alleviation to her sufferings. Use may adapt her palate to the Moberley dishes; may harden her eye to the Moberley stains and rents. Use may accustom her ear to the staccato music of the Moberley voices, and train her mind to find food and occupation in the Helmsley Barracks. As long as each day comes singly, each freighted only with its own load, people can bear a great deal.

Thus Joan thinks, as she strolls after breakfast among the lanky gooseberry-bushes with all the dogs at her heels, or trotting companionably before her, and with the children of Campidoglio Villa peeping at her through the ragged quick-set hedge. After half an hour, spent in trying to cudgel her spirits into content and cheerfulness, she strolls back again to the house; and a quarter of an hour later is walking thoughtfully under an umbrella, and with her hands full of wall-flowers, to the sea. To-day, no one has offered to accompany her. Bell's opinion of the ocean she already knows, nor is Diana so much addicted to the wonders of the deep as to wish to visit them twice

running. So she is alone—alone but for the dogs; the dogs that can rub no one the wrong way; who have no preference for soldiers over civilians, wear no false tails, and try to mitigate the blackness of their faces by no pearl powder, or cream of roses.

Mr. Brown is carrying a long stick—so long that it nearly trips him up, as he gallops bravely past, defiantly eying the other dogs out of the corner of his eye. She stops to look at three cart-horses drinking at a muddy pool, with collars down, slipped over their necks. She wonders how they drink. They do not seem to open their mouths at all; rather to inhale the water through their nostrils. Already she feels soothed. Every trouble is easier to bear out-of-doors than in-doors; and this is true, not only of a great grief, but of a small vexation. The birds of the air, the beasts of the field—yes, the gawky lambs and solemn flapping rooks, the very winds and flowers, help to carry one's load for one. By the time she has reached the sea, she can think with toleration even of Bell and her fur coat.

She is beside the great water now, and, with a long sigh of content, sits down on the shingle. Having explained to the dogs kindly, but firmly, that she does not wish for sandy paws round her neck, or for hot red tongues licking her cheeks; having begged Mr. Brown to cease goggling at her so affectionately, and directed his attention to the insolence of the sea-gulls, she remains at peace, with her hands clasping her knees and her looks directed to the loud glad flood. She watches the large brown waves turn over, lengthily curling, with a booming noise, in the sun; tossing high their foamy heads in the wind, running up to lay their myriad snow-white foam-bubbles at her feet, and then drawing back again with a sucking sound, carrying with them the wet pebbles.

A sea-bird of some kind—a diver of engaging manners—is serenely riding up and down, up and down on the wavering, heaving plain; plunging every two minutes, with a little splash, into the green depths and coming up again black-headed and complacent, a hundred yards from the spot where he disappeared.

She does not know how long she sits watching the sea's courtship of the land—the obstacles that its patience overcomes. There is a ridge of sand between her and the rising tide; it is with trouble, with many intervening discouragements, with repeated efforts, that it climbs the sandy rise, and then joyfully and swiftly pours over its yeasty streams. Why does not the wave break all at once? Instead of doing so it curls over in one place; and then the curl runs along the line, until the whole proud breaker is dissolved into quick and hissing froth. Ah! this one has come farther than any of his predecessors—he is sucking in among the small stones at her very feet.

"'The lightning of the noontide ocean
Is flashing round me, and a tone
Arises from its measured motion,
How sweet did any heart now share in
my emotion!'"

She says this aloud, after a way that she has; but her voice is so soft and the sea is so loud that no one, even if close to her, could hear the words. No sooner are they out of her mouth than she catches the sound of a footstep on the shingle behind her—a quick, firm step. What if it be Micky? What if her poetic aspiration after companionship be all too soon answered? What if Micky be come to

"Share in her emotion?"

He is quite capable of it. She looks round in hasty fear, her features already beginning to dress themselves in the austerity with which yesterday she had chilled that brave man's too easy greeting; but there are other men in the world besides Micky Brand, and this is one of them. Not even in the most ill-lighted room, the dimmest evening light, could

you mistake him for Mr. Brand, and, indeed, he would be very much disgusted with you if you did. It is Wolferstan. In a moment the austerity has fled, dispersed and routed by a surprised red smile.

"'"'Twas when the seas were roaring
With hollow blasts of wind,
A damsel lay deploring
All on a rock reclined!'"

he says with a low laugh, that mixes pleasantly with the noise of the tumbling waves, as he gently and gayly takes her ready hand.

"But I am not 'on a rock,' and I am not 'deploring,'" answers the girl, laughing too.

"She told me that you had gone to Helmsley," he goes on, presently, still prisoning in his her small, cool fingers, and looking at her with an intentness of scrutiny by no means inferior to Mr. Brand's yesterday one (but which yet does not provoke in her at all the same chastely irate emotion), in his happy, handsome eyes; "but I took the liberty of disbelieving her; I knew you had not."

"Who told you that I had?"

"The servant at your—at Mrs. Moberley's. I have been to pay you a visit."

"And did you see any of them?—My aunt—my cousins, I mean?" asks Joan, quickly and nervously, while the red hurries up to her cheeks.

The smile on his face broadens, and his eyes light up mirthfully.

"I saw them, and I did not see them; I think they saw me; I think they were reconnoitring me from behind the blinds." A moment later, still speaking playfully, but with a caressing tone in his low voice: "I knew you had not; I knew that I should find you here. After all, you see, though they are your relations and I am not, I know your ways better than they do."

A little pause, filled up by the wash of the morning waves, while the two young people are looking eagerly, and, as re, half wonderingly, at each other. Though the space of time since they last met is so short, each seems altered in the other's eyes.

Joan is wondering that it had never before struck her what a sweet-toned voice he has; what a fine and polished enunciation; what race-horse nostrils! Can it be possible that in her former life all the men had sweet, full voices, polished enunciations, fine-cut nostrils? and is it the contrast to her present surroundings—to the Moberley voices, accents, noses—that makes Wolferstan's excellences start out with such new saliency? Perhaps it is the lovely setting of the picture—the sea, the sky, the tawny sands—that makes it seem so goodly. One cannot gaze dumbly for more than five minutes at a time at the handsomest live picture without growing embarrassed, and so Joan finds.

"And you?" she says, presently, breaking shyly and hastily the happy silence; "what has brought you here?"

"Do you mean to say that you do not know?" (in a voice of low reproach). His eyes are still meeting hers; it seems as if they would not let them go.

She shakes her head.

"You cannot even guess?"

"No."

"You can lay your hand upon your heart and tell me so?"

It is a good opportunity for loosing her hand from its long bondage, so she does as he suggests, and laying her hand on that spot in her black dress, under which she feels the regular healthy pulsing of her young heart, says:

"I cannot guess."

"On your word?"

"On my word."

"On your honor?"

"Do you wish," says Joan, smiling gravely, "to make me say that I think it was to see me that you have come down? Is that what you are trying to drive me to?"

"That is what I am trying to drive you to."

It is now her turn to look reproachful, and with her the emotion is perhaps more genuine than it was with him.

"How much the better would you be," she says, looking up at him with the limpid sincerity of her eyes, "if you did succeed in making me say what you know as well as I do not to be true? I think I have forgotten how to bandy pretty speeches; life has grown so matter-of-fact, that I take everything *au pied de la lettre*."

"Is it a pretty speech?" he says, with an air of injured innocence which, if counterfeit, is certainly very ably done. "Unless you had suggested the idea, it would never have occurred to me that it was one; and, after all, why should not a pretty speech be occasionally as true as an ugly one? Far be it from me to say that they are all true, or even" (laughing) "that all mine are, God forbid! but this one—" He stops expressively.

She shakes her head disbelievingly, and, turning from him, sits gravely down again on the shingle.

"What other motive could have brought me?" he asks, eagerly, stretching himself on the sand beside her. "Do you think that it can be very amusing sitting down to dinner in a totally empty house, with no society but brown-holland-swaddled chairs and bagged chandeliers? with an elementary kitchen-maid to cook your dinner, and a charwoman to bring it you, do you?" waiting resolutely for an answer, but he gets none.

Joan's eyes are fixed on the broad band of wondrous purple that stretches in royal beauty across the mid-ocean; at the ineffable greens and blues, like the colors of a peacock's neck, with which the waves are shot through and through.

"If you would be so good as to look at me," he goes on, presently, with a tone of slight irritation, noting the direction of her eyes, which is not such as he either wishes or intends, "you would see that, for once in my life, I am speaking truth; well" (after waiting a moment in vain), "well! as you will not, I must trust to the veracity of my voice: as sure as—" (looking vaguely round for something to adjure) "I do not think that I see anything particularly sure anywhere about, so I will use no asseveration—I came down; I made a disagreeable journey at an inconvenient time; I ran the risk of damp beds, and the certainty of bad dinners, wholly and solely to see whether you were yet alive!" A moment after, in a softened voice: "You know that transplantation kills some plants; how could I tell that you were not one?"

Joan laughs a little. "It would take a good deal more than that to kill me," she says; "I am sure that I should be as hard to kill as an eel. I believe that if I were cut in two, each half of me would walk away unhurt, as they say is the case with some insects."

"And you have overlived it?" he says slowly, with a genuine wonder in voice and eyes, as his thoughts revert to the peep he has lately taken at the Moberley establishment, over the grimy parlor-maid's shoulder, and behind the Moberley blinds.

"It seems so."

"And you are—are—are getting on pretty well?"

The question sounds inanely bald, and so it seems to himself; but from the nature of the subject it is difficult to make it more precise.

"Getting on!" repeats Joan, reflectively, with her blue eyes pensively fixed on a far red sail; "I am alive, as you say, and I am in very good health, and I am not beaten or starved; on the contrary, I am very kindly used; if that is to be 'getting on'—yes—I am getting on nicely!"

"And—and there is no change?" pursues the young man, embarrassed, but eager; "nothing—nothing pleasant has happened since we last talked?"

She moves her eyes slowly from the distant brig, and fixes them with a half-ironical smile on his face.

"Do you mean have I yet woke to find myself wealthy? has any one left me a fortune? Well, no! not yet! I am still luxuriating on my godfather's thousand pounds." A moment after, the smile on her face spreading, and growing into a soft laugh of genuine amusement: "I now know why you were so anxious that I should see Mrs. Moberley—no—do not look miserable! I will promise not to tell her; and even if I did, she would not bear malice; she is far too good-natured! I have also ascertained the extent of the park; the number of whose acres I was so determined to learn from you."

"Do not!" cries the young man hastily, looking thoroughly foolish, growing extremely red, and galloping off *ventre à terre* into a different subject. "No other will has been found, then?"

"None, except the old one, made before I was born: I knew that there would not be: he meant to have added a codicil to it; the lawyer was to have come down on the very day!—twenty-four hours made a good deal of difference to my future, did not they?"

She sighs profoundly, and, again turning to the sea, fixes her eyes dejected and patient on the broad flood.

"How could he leave such a thing till the last moment?" cries the young man, with wondering anger; "what culpable—what inexcusable negligence!"

She brings her eyes quickly back again to his face, but they are meek no longer; instead, flaming and flashing. "Do you think it can make things much easier or pleasanter for me to bear," she says, indignantly, "to hear him abused? When you say such things you make me regret that I have ever broached the subject to you; how could he tell that it was the last moment? he was only seventy-two! people oftener than not live till eighty or ninety nowadays: he seemed no more likely to die than you do; does any one ever think that he himself will die? he knows that every one else will, but he does not believe that he will!" After a moment, in a softer, gentler voice of deepest emotion: "My one prayer and trust is," she says, "that he does not know—that he cannot see! Oh! God could not let him see! it would be too cruel! it would break his heart! he that never thought anything could be good enough for me!"

Her voice wavers and breaks. The tears crowd up into her eyes. A rather prolonged silence. Joan's wet eyes go back to the sea, and absently watch the breakers, idly puzzled to see that a big wave with an imposing volume of brown water and noise of foamy froth sometimes does not reach as far as a lesser, humbler one that follows. It is she that at length resumes the conversation. Wolferstan, in fact, is feeling snubbed, and, though not exactly bearing malice, has no intention of laying himself open to a second rebuke.

"Apart from any question of *will*," she says, thoughtfully, "I wonder how I manage to be left so destitute? At the time, I was too miserable to think or reason about it, but since then it has often puzzled me: my father must surely have had a younger son's portion, and, as I was his only child, it would naturally come to me, would not it? I know nothing of the law, but it seems to me that it must be so."

She looks appealingly at him for confirmation or contradiction; but where are Wolferstan's manners? Is he sulky or only inattentive? He has turned quite away from her, and makes no answer, good or bad, to her appeal. She is too preoccupied much to heed his lapse from civility, and goes on:

"Of course I can quite understand, now, why he never mentioned my mother's family to me. I suppose there never was any one who knew less about his parents than I do; I do not even know when and where they first met—when they were married—how long they lived together—"

She stops abruptly, becoming suddenly aware of her auditor's want of attention. His face is still quite turned away, and he has uttered no sound, good or bad.

"You are bored by these details?" she says a moment later, after a rather hurt silence; "and no wonder indeed! I beg your pardon, but—" (with a rather desolate smile)—"here I am so poor in friends, that, like the Ancient Mariner, I button-hole any stranger I chance to meet."

She rises to her feet as she speaks, and prepares to set off homeward. He must look round now—must utter. And he does. He also rises, and turns toward her the face that for the last five minutes he has been so carefully averting. It is redder than its wont. His countenance is troubled, and in his eyes is an expression she does not understand. But even now he makes no reference to the subject of her remarks. He only says in a constrained voice:

"If you think I am bored you are mistaken." Then, a moment after: "Are you going home already? Must you?"

"Unless I wish to lose my dinner," she answers, with a smile.

"Your luncheon, I suppose you mean?"

"I mean my dinner; we dine at two—at least we oscillate between that and four."

"Good Heavens!—and is that all? Have you nothing else—nothing more to look forward to the whole of the livelong day?"

"We have tea and muffins at eight—at least between that and ten."

"Good Heavens!" (throwing back his handsome head and looking up in shocked appeal to the turquoise sky).

"And brandy and soda-water all day long, if we like it."

"Good Heavens!"

"I have hit the right chord now, have not I?" says Joan, with a smile of soft malice; "this is the one of my misfortunes that really touches you. You were bored before" (with gentle persistence), "though you will not own it; but now you are all interest and alert compassion. I have found the right way to your heart—to every man's heart!"

They are walking slowly homeward, side by side, over the thin and bitter grass of the sand-hills, and back into the pleasant meads by which Joan had come.

"You know you must not proportion your pity for me to what your own sufferings would be under a two-o'clock dinner," says Joan presently, with a humorous smile.

"They would be severe, I own," he answers, gravely. "I know no one, the pleasure of whose society would outweigh them; you, somehow, have a knack of making me speak the truth against my will, and I will own to you that I do not think I should enjoy dining at two o'clock, even with you."

She laughs a little; and again they walk on over half a field in silence.

"I hope," says Joan, by-and-by, "that you will not go away with the impression that I am a great object of compassion. I feel as if I had been giving you that idea, and indeed it is not the true one. No one can expect to go through all his life quite smoothly; and perhaps those are best off who have their troubles while they are young—one is so strong when one is young; probably I shall have a prosperous middle age, or a serene old age, or a very easy death, to make up to me—depend upon it, it will be made up to me in some way."

"By a serene old age," cries Wolferstan, contemptuously. "God forbid! No!—take my word for it"—(looking down with a more unveiled admiration than he has yet allowed himself in the eyes, whose wickedness Bell Moberley commends, at the profile beside him—the little sensitive fine nose—the sweet white cheek, clear and clean as privet-flowers—the curled cherry lips)—"there is something better than that ahead of you. There is plenty of fun in life for such as you, between

now and your serene old age" (with a mocking accent).

"Is there?" says Joan, a little doubtfully. "I should not be sorry to think that there were—but if not I can do without it—I can do without it." After a pause—"it is impossible," she says, in a more cheerful tone, "to be quite unhappy as long as one is thoroughly healthy, as long as one is honestly trying to do one's best, and as long as one has a keen sense of the ridiculous. This world's beauty" (looking fondly at all the brave show of young greenery round her), "this world's beauty is a great boon, but I think that its little ridiculousnesses are a still greater! There are very few things or situations in which I do not find something to make me laugh."

They have come to the end of the fields, have crossed the stile that leads back into the road. To arrive at Portland Villa you must turn to the right, to reach Wolferstan's home to the left.

"We will say good-by here," says Joan, gently but resolutely, holding out her hand. "If you escorted me to the house Mrs. Moberley would invite you to luncheon, and you would find it difficult to evade her importunities."

"Why should I evade them?" asks Wolferstan, to whom the problem of how he is to pass the afternoon has been, for the last half-hour, growing ever more and more insoluble, and who has now grasped the desperate resolution of braving the Moberley food (indubitably very awful, if it all tallies with the appearance of the parlor-maid), yet sweetened by Joan's smiles, and lit by the warm blue fire of Joan's eyes.

She shakes her head.

"It would not amuse you, or, perhaps," with a blush, "it would amuse you too much; and it would annoy me extremely. You will say good-by now, I am sure," again making a confident proffer of her hand. This time he takes it.

"You have left me no other word to s answers, rather ruefully.

She has lifted to his, in friendly farewell the two chaste lamps of her clear, serious eyes—eyes well versed in tears, laughter, and tenderness, but unpractised in eye-manœuvre, or finesse; eyes ignorant of—or, if not, disdaining—the unused weapons in their armory. Wolferstan looks back into them, down, down into their modest depths, to see whether no little devil lurks even at the very bottom of them.

But no! With an awe, slightly dashed by irritation, he has to own to himself, as he had to own at their last meeting at Dering, that he might be her grandfather. It is not often women look at him with such vestal eyes. Mostly he has found that the fire of his own, if not caught from women's eyes, has, at least, proved catching to them; but the flame in Joan's might fitly burn on Dian's altar. Would it be a worthy, as it would undoubtedly be an agreeable, task to put out this vestal fire and light another, warmer, if not so clear? The idea is passing through his head, when she speaks and makes him ashamed of it.

"If you really came down from London, and subjected yourself to all the privations you told me of, only to see me—I wonder, did you really?" in a parenthesis of girlish curiosity; "thank you very much for it. If not—if, as I believe, that is only a *façon de parler*, and you came down on some errand of your own, yet, still, thank you. I have thoroughly enjoyed seeing you."

He is very glad to hear it, but would have preferred that she should have been less able to tell him so.

"Do not say it in that solemn valedictory tone!" he answers, laughing lightly; "if you think that you are to be so easily quit of me, you are mistaken. I have something of the gnat about me, I warn you! You always go to the shore in the morning, do not you?"

She smiles and raises her eyebrows a little.

"*Always!* why, I have been here only two days."

"But you went there yesterday morning?"

"Yes."

"About eleven o'clock?"

"Yes."

"And you went to-day?"

"Yes."

"And you will go to-morrow?" in a tone more affirmatory than interrogative.

"By all the laws of analogy!" she answers, breaking into a gay laugh, and so merrily takes leave.

## CHAPTER X.

THE dogs, cantering on ahead of her, have apparently given Miss Dering's family notice of her approach, for, by the time she has reached the gate, she sees that they have all come out to meet her.

Mrs. Moberley, indeed, has advanced no farther than the door-step; but the girls are at the gate. One is holding it open: the other is peeping round the gate-post down the road. By the animation of their features and the unwonted sparkling of their eyes, it is clear that some more powerful motive than affection for their returning kinswoman has brought them out to meet her.

"We have such a piece of news for you!" cry they both in a breath; "we are not going to tell it you—you are to guess it—not that you ever will guess it!"

"And I have something for you—something belonging to you!" cries Bell, who is now discovered to be holding both hands behind her back. "Ah! if you knew what it was, you would not look so cool over it! say which hand—right or left?"

"Right," answers Joan, laconically, and "right" it apparently is, for Miss Bell's plump hand unfolds itself to disclose a man's visiting card, upon which, on a closer survey, the name of "Colonel Wolferstan" is found to be legibly inscribed.

"Not a quarter of an hour after you were gone, he came," goes on Bell, volubly; "I thought that of course it must be Micky—that no one else would call so early, and I was just on the point of running to open the door myself—just fancy if I had!"

"He had to ring four times before Sarah answered the bell," says Diana, taking up the wondrous tale; "I was so much in hopes that he would ask for mother, when he found that you were out; but he did not; he asked, instead, where you had gone to; and I heard Sarah telling him to Helmsley—what possessed her I cannot think! it was just on the tip of my tongue to call out and say, 'No, she has not!' but I just stopped myself in time."

"We had a splendid view of him from behind the drawing-room blinds," says Bell, in antistrophe; "I could not have wished for a better!"

"Bell would put her head so far out of the window," cries Diana, complainingly; "say what I would to her! he must have seen her—he could not have helped!"

"I know he did," rejoins Bell, coloring, but complacent; "our eyes met; I felt that I went so red all in a minute!" After a pause: "If he is very anxious to see you, I should not wonder if he dropped in again later on; do you think there is any likelihood of it? do you think it is likely, Joan? we may as well stay in-doors all the afternoon, on the chance."

"I would not if I were you," says Joan, dryly; "it would be labor lost; if he had any anxiety to see me it has been gratified, for he overtook me on the shore."

"And you have been sitting on the beach with him?" cry both together, breathless and awe-struck.

"Yes."

"All this time?"

"All this time."

"How I wish now that I had gone with you this morning!" cries Bell, remorsefully; "but who would have thought it? all these years I have never met a creature on the shore—never!"

"You know I always said that I did not dislike the sea as much as you did! did not I, Joan?" says Diana, in a tone of triumph, at having her toleration for the deep so signally justified.

"Is he there still, should you think?" says Bell, in a rather languishing voice, and with her head slightly but sentimentally on one side; "did you leave him there? or did he come with you part of the way back?"

"Our road home was the same, you know!" answers Joan, blushing faintly; "so, of course, we came as far as the last stile together."

"Why did not you bring him in to luncheon?" asks Mrs. Moberley hospitably; having, by this time, descended from the door-step and slowly advanced to join her family; "poor fellow! it would have been a charity—all alone in that big house! I think we might have kept his spirits up among us—eh, girls?"

"Thank God you did not!" says Diana, in a devout aside; then in a louder key: "Probably, mother, Joan bore in mind what you announced to us this morning, that there is nothing but a sheep's head for dinner!"

"No more there is!" says Mrs. Moberley, contentedly; "the butcher is late with the meat, as usual, so we have to make it out with odds and ends!"

"Fancy asking Anthony Wolferstan to sit down to a sheep's head!" cries Bell, laughing affectedly. "I should have expired!"

"I dare say that he has often sat down to a worse thing!" answers Mrs. Moberley, sturdily. "Dear me! how a sheep's head does take me back to former times! how your poor father did love a sheep's head! never a week passed that we did not have one!"

"From all the anecdotes that you tell us of him, I think that father must have had rather gross tastes!" says Diana, calmly.

"To think that a quarter of an hour should have made such a difference!" says Bell, still unable to tear herself from the original theme—"all the difference—if he had been a quarter of an hour earlier, or you had been a quarter of an hour later, he would have come in, and you would have been obliged to introduce him to us; I must say that I should dearly like to know him, if it were only enough to be able to bow to him when we meet him in the road."

. . . . . .

It is not often in April, and in the first half of April too, that one sees five consecutive days of honeyed warmth, and strong summer shining; but it is so this year. The mighty young light next morning pouring into Joan's eyes, and waking her at an unearthly hour, when even the birds speak sleepily, shows her that not yet is there any lessening of the kingly beauty of the weather. Her first taste of the morning wind at her wide-flung window tells her that there is no touch of shrewish east in it. She looks out yawningly toward her friend the sea, and, so looking, ceases to yawn and smiles instead, at some recollection apparently.

"He is the last link that connects me with civilization," she says; "that is what gives him a factitious value; it would have been just as pleasant sitting there with any other of my old friends"—(running over in her head a rather long list)—"yes—just as pleasant!" So saying she goes back to bed, and, still smiling, falls asleep again.

Later on, after breakfast, she is again wistfully eying the ocean; leaning against the gate-posts, surrounded by the dogs, who are asking as plainly as short, excited barks and pathetically-goggling eyes can ask, whether she is going out to walk, and, if so, why she has not hat on. She is asking herself

question. Shall she go to the sea-shore, after all? Were Wolferstan still in London she undoubtedly would. Why, then, should she let his goings or comings influence or constrain hers? How winning the fresh fields would look! How interesting it would be to see how much the young wheat-blades have sprung since this time yesterday! and how many more marsh marigolds have lit their brave gold fire by the little swampy pool in the meadow! And the sea! There is less wind to-day. To-day there would be no white horses tossing their snow-crests; no noisy breakers riotously tumbling; only an unbounded stretch of burnished silver, panting as in some great love-ecstasy.

She half closes her eyes, and with inward vision longingly sees the unnumbered curves, losing themselves in one another; the dreamy ripple creeping to her feet; the green mermaid's hair afloat on the tide; the warm sands; and across them Wolferstan, stepping to meet her, with his low laugh, and his welcoming eyes. At the thought of his, her own reopen rather quickly.

"And you will go there to-morrow?"

The confidence of tone, the almost certainty with which he spoke these words, reëchoes in her ears. Why was he so sure that she would go? After all, what could Bell or Di do worse than hurry off at the first beck to meet their Bob or Micky at a given rendezvous?

"Now that I am poor, and of no reputation, I must hold my head a great deal higher, and more stiffly than I did in my palmy days! I will not go!" So saying, she turns resolutely away, and reenters the house.

The dogs see that hope is extinct, and, dropping their tails and voices, seek other avocations. Mr. Brown retires to the flower-bed, and begins to dig up a bone that he had wisely buried there yesterday, as a precaution against moments of [illegible]. Regy strolls down the road in [illegible] loves; and of the other four it is only needful to say that they have caught sight of the end of the tail of the Campidoglio cat. In-doors Joan finds all haste, bustle, and millinery. Early this morning arrived an unexpected summons to bliss and barracks for the happy Misses Moberley; at least, the next best thing to barracks—a garden-party and dance afterward, given by the colonel's wife. By superhuman exertions, by pressing into their service every living thing on the premises, the Misses Moberley hope that, by four o'clock in the afternoon, their new alpacas will have been fashioned into something so like a resemblance to one of Joan's gowns as to enable them, without too flagrant a violation of truth, to tell their friends that they are made on a Paris pattern. The establishment being wholly female, every member of it, without exception, is stitching. Even the cook has been commanded to lay aside all thoughts of pots and pans, and exchange her professional skewer for a needle. For a few moments Joan stands by in rueful silence, eying her martyred gown, which is being pulled about, measured, pried into, unpicked a little here and there. Then she conquers herself and offers to help.

"Do you mean to say that you can sew?" asks Bell, with a little shrill laugh; "I should have thought that you were the sort of girl that would have been waited upon, hand and foot, and would never have set a stitch for yourself!"

"Appearances are deceitful, then!" answers Joan, quietly, sitting down, and settling resolutely to a long morning of feminine toil. And a very long morning it is. With no break of intervening dinner, it stretches away indeed into the afternoon. The room grows hot and the air confined, for, Mrs. Moberley having mislaid her big pair of scissors, no one is able to open the French window. By long stooping over her work, the blood not only seems to rush to her head but to stay there. She drops her stitching at last, and lifts both hands to her hot forehead.

"I must say that it is rather hard upon Joan having all the work and none of the fun!" says Mrs. Moberley, compassionately, having herself come to a temporary pause in her labors, and being in the act of fanning herself with a sheet of the *Young Ladies' Journal;* "though, for my part, why you should not make one of us to-day, Joan, I cannot see; of course a grandfather would stand in the way of a public ball, or any such great formal do-ment—I am the last to say that he would not; but a little friendly frolic like this—no sit-down supper nor anything—nothing but ices and claret-cup, you may depend—and all got up in a moment too."

Joan shakes her head wearily.

"I had rather not, if you do not mind."

"Oh, please yourself, and you will please me!" rejoins Mrs. Moberley, waving the *Young Ladies' Journal* with a rather irritated air; "but I will say this, that who it is you take after I do not know. It certainly is not your poor mamma; she would have gone barefoot thirty miles any day for the chance of a *valse!*"

It is half-past four o'clock before the Moberley family, having snatched a hasty cold refreshment from a tray—having triumphantly endued the just finished alpacas—stand ready to depart. Diana's head is surmounted by Micky's hat, from which the bird-of-paradise's ample tail floats bold and challenging as ever. It is too hot for Bobby's jacket; so in this respect—having nothing to correspond to the hat—Arabella labors under an inferiority to her sister.

"I have seen worse-looking girls once or twice, have not you, Joan?" says Mrs. Moberley, regarding her offspring with a playful complacency. "Quite the thing, I declare! As soon as you are out of mourning—three months, or six, will it be? very likely six, as you have got such a good stock of black by you—but as soon as you are out, I do not see why you should not all dress alike. There is nothing that looks better than three stylish girls pin for pin alike; they set each other off."

They are gone now. With unfurled parasols and flying ribbons, they are sailing gloriously down the road. Joan strolls into the garden, and, standing on the broken pedestal of the old sun-dial, lays her hot cheek against the welcome coolness of its stained and ancient face. Then she lifts her head and reads again the short and half-effaced inscription, "Tempus fugit!"

"That must be my comfort," she says, sighingly; "everything passes, nothing stays! Let us do right, and, whether happiness come or unhappiness, it is no very mighty matter. If it come, life will be sweet; if it do not come, life will be bitter—bitter, not sweet, and yet to be borne."

These brave words are not Joan's own. Still, the very uttering of them makes her feel stronger. She puts on her hat and sets off for a long walk—not to the sea, however—she turns her back stoically upon it; to-morrow she will return thither. To-morrow the yellow sands will be again untrodden wastes, disturbed by no quick young foot, probably, but her own. But to-day she will abstain.

She rambles aimlessly away with no other guiding impulse than the desire to avoid Helmsley, and the determination to keep away from the ocean. She follows the dogs' noses more than any other leader. Where the rabbit-scent is strongest thither they take her. After a while she finds herself in a little still wood, alone. Only the sound of rustled leaves and a small squeaking bark of utter excitement now and then tell her that her companions are still within hail, and are in zealous pursuit of the ground-game of somebody unknown.

It would be a useless waste of voice to call them, for they certainly would not obey. So with a sigh of content she sits

down on the warm, dry, leafy bed, and leans her still aching head against the smooth stem of a young beech-tree. She has taken off her hat and bared her forehead to the light handling of the baby winds. With a sense of deep, thorough peace and enjoyment, she looks about her—at the sticky horse-chestnut buds beginning to break into crumpled leaf; at the wood-anemones, pure as snow-drops but not half so cold, lifting their fine white heads and delicate green collars; at the primroses blossoming out in pale life from among the dead oak-leaves, brown and curled.

Apparently, however, solitary peace is not to be her portion for long. Not more than five or ten minutes has she been resting in dreamy tranquillity, when a step, heavier than the dogs' light scampering patter, troubles the quiet of the wood—some game-keeper, probably, justly irate at the invasion of his covers and the disturbance of his pheasant's-eggs. Well, if she is to be scolded, she may as well be scolded sitting as standing. So she neither rises nor changes her position. With cheek leaned against the beech-bark, she awaits the on-comer's advent. Nearer, nearer, the quick foot-falls come; he means to pass close beside her—he does not mean to pass by her at all—he has stopped. With a half-frightened start she looks up. After all, she might as well have gone to the sea.

"No man can be more wise than destiny." It is Wolferstan!

## CHAPTER XI.

"How about the laws of analogy?" he asks, taking off his hat, and looking rather angry; "what has become of them since yesterday?"

She looks up, smiling subtilely.

"They are temporarily suspended."

The sweet carnation color that surprise and half fright have sent flying up into her cheeks is kept prisoner there by pleasure. After a moment: "Did you really expect to meet me there?" she asks.

Her smile is catching. A reflection of it brightens the young man's aggrieved features.

"If I had any self-respect I should answer 'No;' but as I have not, I will confess to you that 'yes, I did!'"

"And you went there yourself?"

"Of course."

"And waited some time?"

"About two hours, I should think," replies the young man, gravely; "I built three large sand-castles, and saw two of them washed away; and I collected more cockle-shells than I ever saw together in my whole life before."

"Et puis?"

"Puis—I gave it up as a bad job—particularly as I was becoming an object of ridicule to three little boys and a nursery-maid; then I took my stand at that stile that commands the Helmsley road and your house; I thought, from the little I knew of you, that not even to avoid me could you stay mewed up in-doors all such a day as this; then I saw the Misses Moberley and their mamma set forth, arrayed like Solomon in all his glory. Then I ventured a little nearer, and watched you collect your dogs and set off—by-the-by, may I sit down near you?—at least a great way off—just within ear-shot? or, if I do, will you at once get up and walk away?"

She laughs a little.

"Do not be afraid! I am far too comfortable to stir."

"I stalked you stealthily," pursues Wolferstan, resuming his narrative; "I knew that if I ventured to overtake you, you would turn back, reënter the house, and give me my *congé* with as cold-blooded and inexorable a gentleness as you did yesterday."

"You are very persistent!" she says, looking at him with a slow, serious smile; "such perseverance, directed to worthier objects, might make you do great things."

"When one has come one hundred and twenty miles to see one pair of—I mean to attain one object," answers the young man, emphasizing his words by the steady fire of his look, "one is hardly content to go away without having succeeded, at least in some measure, in it."

The flush on Joan's face has hitherto amounted only to a fair, cool pink; now it strengthens to a hot, red glow of indignation; quite as beautiful to look at, but not nearly so comfortable to the wearer.

"May I beg of you not to make me any pretty speeches?" she says, hurriedly; "I cannot tell you how they humiliate me! I never was fond of them in my good days—never; but now—now I dislike them far more than ever I did!" (giving one blue flash out of her eyes at him, and then hastily looking away). "If I were an unsophisticated country girl of seventeen, I could understand your thinking that they would please me; but I am surprised at your imagining that a woman who has been three—nearly four years in the world—your own world, should be so credulous!"

"I stand reproved," answers Wolferstan, quietly; "I am aware that in society it is nearly as rude to tell persons that you like them as that you dislike them. I withdraw the obnoxious statement; I came down to see that the rooms were kept properly aired."

She smiles a little against her will.

"If you really mean to be a friend to me," she continues presently, in a rather appeased tone, and looking at him with the direct and open honesty of her eyes—"and, indeed, I am very willing that you should be so—I am not so rich in them that I can afford to throw away one—but if you do, will you promise to treat me exactly as you would a man-friend? you would not—" (blushing again a little, but quite slightly and pleasantly) — "you would not compliment a man-friend on the color of his eyes, would you?"

He laughs.

"Probably not."

"Then exercise the same forbearance toward me!" she says, gayly yet earnestly; "if you do, it will put me into much better humor both with myself and you; will you promise me—will you?"

"Promise to look upon you as a man?" says Wolferstan, leaning his back against a stalwart oak, that, as yet, holds forth no sign of summer clothing, and answering her with a gravity equal to her own; "no, I do not think I can; if you knew what men are, you would not wish me to do so! —promise to refrain from pretty speeches to you?—willingly!"

"It is a bargain, then!" she cries, merrily, stretching out her hand frankly to him; "let us shake hands upon it! but mind—at the first complimentary allusion to the shape of my nose, or the color of my hair, our friendship dissolves, smashed, splintered into a thousand fragments."

"And now," says Wolferstan, laughing gayly, and diminishing by a couple of yards the space that he had at first ostentatiously put between them; "now that you have prescribed your conditions, I am going to prescribe—no! that is much too courageous a word—going meekly to suggest mine."

She smiles a little suspiciously.

"It is a thousand pounds to one penny that I do not accept them!"

"Let us suppose that you are the man-friend that you are so anxious to be, and that I am not at all anxious that you should be, and that I had made an appointment to meet you in Pall Mall, to which you had agreed, would you at once set off for Seven Dials?"

She laughs mischievously.

"I think it is more than probable."

"You are forgetting that you are a man," says Wolferstan, gravely, "and that the privilege of snapping your fingers at common-sense, and producing effects without causes, is wholly feminine."

"Then I will not be a man!" she cries, a little petulantly; "away with my *toga virilis!* I resume my distaff."

"If I am to be a friend," continues

Wolferstan, more earnestly, and beating out his proposition with the forefinger of one hand on the palm of the other, "I will not be treated as an enemy—there is no logic in it; I will not be suspected and shunned! What harm—" (speaking more quickly and eagerly, and looking into her attentive face) — "what harm do you think I am planning you? As I live, I have no thought or wish but for your good and pleasure—and my own!" (in a lowered voice, with an after-thought of candor). "Placed as we are—as chance has placed us—we may considerably sweeten each other's lives; why, in Heaven's name, should not we?"

Her eyes are fixed in grave inquiry, asking for explanation, on his, but she says nothing.

"Do not think," he continues, "that I overrate my own worth in your eyes, or that I think that you see charms in me which you have never given me reason to suppose that you do; if the old state of things still continued, I am aware that I should have no value at all—I should be one of a mob, as I always used to be; but now, as you said yesterday, I am the last fragment left of the good old life—your last connecting link with civilization—is not it so?"

Her eyelids droop over her sad eyes.

"Yes," she says, sighingly.

"Any society procurable *there*," he goes on, indicating by a gesture the direction where Helmsley smoke, turned gold by the sun, hangs against the sky, "I warn you beforehand, that you will not be able, for one moment, to tolerate."

"You are mistaken," she answers, resolutely; "henceforth I do not mean to allow myself any fine-lady squeamishness. I wince now, because these are early days; by-and-by I shall not wince."

He shakes his head.

"You have been transplanted too late; you will never take kindly to the soil."

An expression of pain crosses her face.

"If it is so, what is the use of telling me?" she cries, reproachfully. "I am *in* the soil, and, whether I flourish or whether I wither, here I must stay, at least for the present." After a moment's pause: "I had rather not talk about it; things talked about and discussed gain a substance and importance that they never have when they are not put into words. Things that must be, must; if you" (looking at him with a slightly satirical smile) "were to fall down from your high estate, you would find that it would not kill you; you would find yourself alive at the bottom of the hill. I have found myself alive."

A silence—at least as much silence as there ever can be in a spring wood.

Some of the dogs have come back, and now lie on the leafy, primrosy bed, with their fawn-sides heaving, and their tongues hanging out sideways surprisingly far. Mr. Brown, whose increasing *embonpoint* has told upon his wind, lays his puckered face on Joan's black lap, and falls sweetly, if snoringly, asleep.

Joan's eyes are fixed on a spot where, through the still bare oak-boughs, she can see a nation of Lent lilies spreading over a neighboring field: fair Lent lilies—April fine ladies with their pale-yellow gowns, and their deeper-yellow petticoats. Her heart is echoing Wolferstan's words—"You will never take kindly to the soil." No, never. She will always be a blanched, sickly plant, like a geranium in a town cellar. What is it that gives her this sense of well-being, of smooth comfort and pleasure, in Wolferstan's society?

As far as wisdom is concerned, any or all of his remarks might have been uttered by Micky Brand; nor has he needed reprimanding for over-civility, less than did that other hero. And yet how soothed—how much at home she feels with him! The certainty of immunity from underbred jests, of having her allusions understood, and of being on the same plane of thought, makes her feel that, though an inscrutable destiny has poured blood of the same quality into her veins and those of the Moberleys, yet

by every law of affinity she is much more nearly akin to the young man lying in the gold sunshine at her feet. Advantages in him which before had passed unnoticed — taken for granted — now start out in delightful prominence. The quality of his voice—the purity of his provincialisms—these it is which contrast so blessedly with the loud and twangy pronunciations of her relatives—her relatives — whose every laugh, yawn, sneeze, sets her teeth on edge.

The object of her thoughts breaks in upon them by saying:

"My people will be down here by the end of July; they generally stay here most of the autumn. I do not at all promise that you will like them. My father, poor old man, is not in a condition to be either liked or disliked, as, perhaps, you have heard; and my mother—no" (with a little reflective smile)—"I cannot even promise that you will be very much delighted with her, but they mostly have the house full of pleasant people; and, if you will let us hold out the right hand of fellowship to you, I think we may make your life a shade more endurable. Of course" (with a slight shrug), "if you resolutely set up your quills against us, we can do nothing."

She shakes her head.

"If you are a fish," she says, a little doggedly, "it is best to stay in the water; if a bird, in the air. If you have sunk to a lower level, it is wiser to keep to it, and not to be standing on tiptoe straining up to the heights you have left."

He looks a little disappointed.

"You refuse the right hand of fellowship, then?"

"No, I do not," she says, sorrowfully. "If I were wise I should; but I suppose that one is greedy of pleasure. Most likely, if your mother holds it out, I shall snatch at it; but" (in a lighter tone) "she has not done so yet. It will be time enough to talk about it when she does."

Another silence — a silence gently, dreamily sad on the part of the girl; pleasantly and rather affectionately reflective on the part of the man; serenely somnolent on the part of the dogs. As usual, the dogs have the best of it. It is broken at last by Joan, not because she wishes to speak, or has anything special to say, but because she feels that, however great may be the strides that her intimacy with Wolferstan has lately taken, she does not yet know him well enough to sit beside him in that total silence which is the privilege only of perfect friendship or assured love.

"Are you down here—I mean, at the Abbey—much?" she asks, presently.

He shakes his head, and stretches out a lazy hand to pat Mr. Brown's fat flank.

"Not much; not nearly so much as I should be, only that, whenever I do come down, mother and I always manage to fall out about one and the same subject. The fact is" (laughing slightly, and looking with a faintly-heightened color at the girl's serene face)—"the fact is, that she is always worrying me to marry; why, I cannot understand, as in any case she has my brother to fall back upon: a *rangé*, gray-headed boy, who, unlike me, never follows wandering fires."

"And you do not feel able to oblige her?" asks Joan, with an expression of friendly interest, looking back at him with a perfectly unembarrassed smile, which, unknown and certainly unconfessed to himself, rather annoys him.

Again he shakes his head, and laughs.

"To my thinking the laws of marriage require a good deal of modification, before they are adapted to the needs of so advanced a civilization as ours." A moment later, speaking with an almost irritated quickness and eagerness: "What, in Heaven's name, is it about you that makes me, against my will, admit to you truths that I know will lower me in your estimation? Perhaps"—(laughing a little restlessly)—"perhaps if you sat with your back to me I might

lapse into my usual gently inventive vein. I think that it is your eyes that—no—" (seeing her hold up her finger in warning)—"it is no infringement of our bargain—it is nothing complimentary—rather the reverse—to tell you that your eyes are rigidly truthful and truth-compelling."

"Perhaps it will be safer to abstain from any remarks at all about them," answers Joan, with a rather cold smile. "Let us suppose that I have no eyes."

"With all my heart," rejoins he, laughing. "Five minutes ago we agreed that you were a man, now you are a blind man. I shudder to think of what you may become in the course of the next five minutes." Another pause; then Wolferstan resumes with some heat his original theme. "Imagine swearing to love any woman, or, in a woman's case, any man, half a century hence, as warmly as you do now; when I look back ten years and see how in that short space every idea, feeling, opinion, is changed or modified, how can I expect that at the end of fifty or sixty years one remnant of the original *I* will be left? Half a century! always opposite the same face, always fond, always faithful, it is"—(throwing his eyes upward to the brown tree-roof above him)—"it is a monstrous thing to ask of any human being."

He looks at Joan in half-laughing, half-serious appeal, but neither eyes nor mouth give him any hint of her agreement or disagreement. The one is shut, the others are down-dropped to the primroses in her lap, and with her fingers she is lovingly stroking their downy stalks.

"One might as well," pursues the young man, beginning to curl Mr. Brown's tail (relaxed in slumber) round his finger, and thereby waking and vexing him—"one might as well swear to have all one's teeth in one's jaws, or all one's hair on one's head, at the end of the same period; the one seems to me quite as much within one's own power as the other."

Still no word or sign of assent or dissent.

"When I say a thing," continues the young man, speaking more gravely, while the faithless light of his gray eyes steadies to a more serious shining—"I mean, when I say it soberly and solemnly, I like to be able to persuade at least myself that I mean it, and am going to stick to it; if"—(reddening a little)—"if I, as I now am, were to swear to love any one woman wholly and exclusively for the rest of my natural life, I should feel that I was the most consummate ruffian in existence; for I should know that I was swearing a lie! Do you now see why I cannot oblige my mother?"

She nods slightly.

"Yes, I see!"

She has risen to her feet, and so stands tall and willowy. The flame-eyed west sun is boldly kissing her swart clothes and her milky throat, and her red lips; and the ruffed anemones are crowding about her feet.

"And you think that I am right?" cries the young man, eagerly snatching, as if involuntarily, at the hand that, loosely drooping by her side, hangs nearest to him, and locking it, with all its crushed primroses, in his firm young clasp.

"I think," she says, with a slow, soft smile, while her blue eyes rest gently, coolly, sweetly, on the restless fire of his—"I think that a day will come when you will change your tune; when you will blame the fifty years for being too short, not too long; at least, for your sake, I hope that it will!"

## CHAPTER XII.

"It seems to be always good-by!" Wolferstan is saying, a little ruefully.

Together they have strolled slowly home through the dew-crisped meadows. Together they have watched the sun's nightly swoon—what so quickly rises.

again into life, cannot be called death—and praised his parting benediction to the courtier clouds.

Together they now stand in the dusty road at the gate of Portland Villa. Joan smiles soberly.

"'How do you do?' would lose all his charm—specially in men's eyes—if they did not know that his brother 'Good-by' treads so hard upon his heels."

"They are not come back yet," says Wolferstan, surveying with his eyes the front of the house—silent windows, and closed door; "if they were" (smiling), "I feel sure that I should see some indication of them, as I did yesterday morning."

"I did not expect them," answers Joan; "they have gone to a dance; they will not be back till two or three o'clock."

"And you will be alone all evening?"

"Yes."

"And" (in a rather lowered voice), "and I shall be alone all evening!"

"Yes."

If he had contemplated proposing any plan that should entail their not being alone all evening, something, either in her face or in her "yes," makes him change his mind.

"Which is your window?" he asks, lifting his eyes to the upper story. "I should be sorry to mistake Mrs. Moberley's for it; I shall be passing by to-morrow morning on my way to the station before you are awake; and though I shall see only your blinds—"

"You will certainly not see them," answers Joan, laughing; "for I have none; they fell to pieces ten years ago, and have never since been replaced."

A moment's silence. The wind is making a soft sighing bustle in the hedge, and the distant Helmsley churches chime eight.

"You will not send me a line now and then, I suppose?" suggests Wolferstan diffidently, leaning on the gate.

"Certainly not."

"Not even if you are in any trouble?"

"I cannot imagine any trouble in which you would be able to help me," she answers, gravely; "if I were sick, I could not ask you to nurse me; if I were starving, I could not ask you for bread."

"Then why call me friend?" cries the young man, hotly; "what is the use of an empty name in which there is no meaning?"

She smiles a little teasingly.

"As you say, what use?—let us drop it!"

"If," continues the young man, eagerly—"if, by-and-by—not very soon—I run down again to—to—see whether the rooms are kept aired"—(laughing a little)—"will there be any chance—is it likely that—that the laws of analogy will have resumed their sway?"

"Do you mean," she answers, smiling, yet gravely, while her look meets his, full-eyed and collected—"do you mean shall I be likely to make appointments to meet you on the shore?—most assuredly not!—I know nothing more unlikely; if we meet accidentally—really accidentally—not accidentally on purpose"—(laughingly)—"I shall be delighted; I like to see you: it gives me pleasure; as I have told you till you must be tired of hearing it, you are the last connecting link between me and my good old life!"

He makes an impatient gesture with his foot, which, had he been a child, would have been called a stamp.

"I am tired of being a link," he says, petulantly; "I will not be a link any longer! it sounds as if I were a high-class ape! when—in how much time—shall I stand upon my own merits? in how many months—years—will you be glad to see me because I am *I*, and for no tedious second reasons?"

"Ah! when?" she echoes, playfully; and so, with no further good-by, quietly eludes him, and, slipping through the gate and into the house, disappears.

. . . . . .

It is next morning. Wolferstan is gone, and has taken the summer weather with him. It is not the sun that wakes her to-day; but the sound of Wolferstan's wheels, rolling sharply through her dreams. Cautiously hidden behind her curtains, so that not a tip of nose or end of eyelash may be seen, she watches him bowl past; while the chill rain drives into his eyes, tries to put out his cigar, and blurs his last view of Mrs. Moberley's window, at which he is mistakenly gazing.

By the time she is dressed and downstairs the day has made up its mind to be regularly wet; no shilly-shallying half-measures! The panes are already streaming; the wind whistles instead of sighing; the young flowers shiver and shrink, and the dogs, having been lured to the front-gate by the insulting noises made in passing; by a butcher's boy, trot back with lowered tails, shaking their coats and sneezing.

The house appears quite empty, though certainly neither "swept" nor "garnished." Not a soul above nor below stairs shows signs of life. For the early part of the day she will probably be companionless, as the Moberley family are repairing by sleep the ravages of yesternight's dissipation.

To be equally without occupation; to have no other employment than to sit with idle hands, wondering to what station on his London route Wolferstan has yet attained, is out of the question.

"I never used to wonder how far he was on his journey," she says to herself with a sort of surprise, standing at the window looking out at the sickly cypresses bowing in the gale, listening to the moaning of the rain-laden sea-wind. "When he was gone, he was gone—and there was an end of him! there *must* be an end of him now."

Resolutely so saying, she turns away at once from the window, and, stepping lightly and softly past the Moberleys' doors, mounts to the lumber-room at the top of the house, whither most of her big boxes have been relegated. From one of them she extracts an armful of books, and, carrying them down-stairs with her, buries herself in them.

It is past mid-day before the Misses Moberley and their parent, yawning, pale, *désœuvrées*, with sketchy toilet details, and heavy eyelids, make their appearance. Evidently incapable of any other occupation than reminiscence they throw themselves into the three soundest and easiest chairs that the flimsily-furnished room affords.

"It was *heavenly*," says Bell, with a prodigious emphasis, in answer to an inquiry from her cousin as to how they had enjoyed themselves. "How I wish it could all come over again! All of *them* were there, and nearly half another regiment from Kingsford besides. I am sure that I might have danced every dance three times over; so might Di!"

"That was only because there were so few girls," says Diana, bluntly; "they had had a great many disappointments; that was why they sent off post haste for us at the last moment."

"I cannot think, Di," cries Mrs. Moberley, fretfully, "why you always seem to have such a pleasure in taking the gilt off our ginger-bread.—Do you know, Bell"—with a sudden change in the current of her ideas—"do you know, Bell, it strikes me that they must have had the whole supper, just as it stood, from Tucker in the High Street—only the soups to be heated up, you know. A pretty penny it must have cost them; I never saw anything better done in my life—no stint anywhere, and the champagne-corks flying the whole of the night."

"I dare say," answers Bell, indifferently; "of course, the supper is everything to you, but I do not care about it myself; I am always far too excited to eat." After a moment—"You really must come next time, Joan! You need not be afraid of any lack of partners; it will be pick and choose with you, and, indeed, they are all on the alert to see you al-

ready. We have given such a glowing description of you—you may trust us for that!"

"Indeed, Joan, there is no reason why you should mew yourself up," says Mrs. Moberley, joining in assentingly, "a fine, showy girl like you! Better make hay while the sun shines"—laughing—"in a white gown with a black sash, and black shoes and black ornaments; if you do not happen to have any, Di has got a pair of gutta-percha bracelets that she could lend you. No one would think of expecting more of you than that, particularly"—dropping her voice to a very low key—"particularly under the circumstances!"

Joan makes no reply beyond a very small shake of the head, and a still smaller smile. When the battle has to be fought really, she has no doubt of having strength enough and to spare for it, but now it would be waste of fibre—there being no warlike dissipation, and therefore no need for evading it this afternoon.

"And you?" says Bell, stretching out both arms, and laying her limp head back on the chair-cushion; "how did you manage to get through the evening—you slept, I dare say? No more adventures on the beach, I suppose?"

"I did not go there."

"Then you saw nothing more of Anthony Wolferstan, I suppose? *Anthony!* —dear me, what a lovely name it is! How I wish that I knew him well enough to call him Anthony!"

To Joan's wonder and immeasurable disgust and sorrow, she feels herself blushing; feels the slow red burning grow and strengthen in her cheeks. For once in her life she would give one or both her ears to be able to tell a lie; but now, as ever, it is impossible to her.

"I walked in the other direction," she answers, with a collected, if crimson, gravity, "to a wood—I do not know its name—but he happened to overtake me."

"*Happened!*" echoes Mrs. Moberley, in a raised key, and with a roguishly rallying smile, while Diana stops in mid-yawn, and Bell lifts her languid, lolling head with suddenly revived animation; "we all know what kind of 'happened' that is—do not we, girls? So, after all, Miss Joan, it seems that you are as much up to a little bit of mischief as the others!"

Unused to this kind of banter, hating it past the power of any words to express, feeling the tears rising in her throat, and trying to swallow them back, Joan sits in red misery, as complete a picture of discomfiture in a small way as the world can afford. Taking, perhaps, her dumbness for the silence of enjoyment, or else too much preoccupied with her own merriment to give a thought to the subject of Joan's feelings, Mrs. Moberley is already preparing for more badinage, when Di gallantly rushes to the rescue.

"What a pile of books you have there, Joan!" she cries, with abrupt compassion changing the subject, taking up a volume and looking at its title-page; "no wonder that the carrier complained of the weight of your boxes."

"'When land is gone, and money spent,
Then learning is most excellent!'"

answers Joan, recovering her countenance and her self-command, and looking gratefully back at her cousin; "as—" (smiling a little sadly) "as my whole fortune lies in my brains, I like to know how large it is; if, as is most probable, I shall have to be a governess, it is as well to know what I can teach!"

"Governess!" echoes Mrs. Moberley, with a brusque heartiness; "fiddlesticks' ends, and fried eggs! You have no more need to be governess than Bell or Di has; the only difference is, that now I have three daughters instead of two; three little pigs to drive to market"—(with a comfortable chuckle). "If your own flesh and blood (and what *can* be well nearer than an *aunt?*) cannot board

and lodge you at a pinch, things *are* come to a pretty pass."

"I would not be a governess," cries Bell, throwing up her eyes to the well-smoked ceiling, and shrugging her shoulders, "no—not for anything you could give me! If we were reduced in circumstances, that is the very last thing that I should ever think of turning my hand to."

"How servants do despise governesses!" pursues Mrs. Moberley, sliding into placid reminiscence. "I remember what trouble we used to have with ours when we were girls; the button-boy never would answer her bell when she rang; and the cook always forgot to send up her supper. I declare, Bell"—(with a sudden change of tone from calm recollection of the past to warm excitement in the present)—"I declare, Bell, if those pigs are not in the garden again—there never was anything like the cleverness of a pig about opening gates."

So saying, as quickly as the peculiarities of her form will allow, and followed by her eldest daughter, she hurries out of the room.

Diana and Joan remain behind, in silence at first; then Di speaks:

"Were you joking, or are you going to be a governess, really?"

"Really."

"You will not like it."

"No, I know that I shall not," replies Joan, her eyes absently fixed on the figure of her aunt, as seen through the window, in water-proof and clogs, with arms extended like a windmill, splashing through the puddles in pursuit of the alien swine. "But you think"—(with a short, uneasy laugh and painful blush)—"that *that*—that anything, in fact—would be better than—than—*us!*"

Joan looks uncomfortable.

"I think," she says, gently, "that no young, able-bodied person, who can earn his own bread, has any business to be eating other people's all his days."

"Taine's 'Nouveaux Essais de Critique et d'Histoire,'" says Diana, slowly spelling out one of the titles. "You are not reading them for pleasure, then?" (in a relieved voice). "I thought you could not be."

Joan laughs.

"They expect so much from governesses nowadays!" resumes Diana, presently. "Do you mean to say"—(in a rather awed tone)—"that you think you are up to the mark?"

"That is what I want to find out."

"We are grossly ignorant," resumes the other, candidly; "grossly. The other day—in the winter, Bobby—Bell's Bobby, you know—offered to lend us a French novel. We took it, because we did not like to own that we could not read it; but we could not"—(shaking her head)—"we could not make head or tail of it."

"Shall I teach you?" cries Joan, eagerly. "Will you be my first pupil?—the first victim of my inexpertness? Do—I am quite serious; it would be a boon to me, and—"

"Go back into the school-room again!" cries Diana, opening her eyes widely in surprise at this proposition; "why, Bell and I were finished two years ago; I was nineteen last February; many people are married at nineteen: several of our schoolfellows were—one had a baby."

"But you are not married!" replies Joan, again laughing; "and until that blessed epoch arrives—"

"It never will," replies Diana, solemnly and sorrowfully, shaking her head; "who would marry *us?*" she says, with a sincere self-scorn. "Do we look like the sort of girls that men *marry?*—it never struck me in that light till you came, but now I see that we are fit to be nothing but camp-followers!—I believe that I must have been born in a baggage-wagon!"

"Must you?" with a rather embarrassed smile.

"Even if I shaved my fringe," continues Diana, gravely, pulling it out over her eyes, and squinting awfully in the

endeavor to see it; "even if I daily dipped my head into a bucket of cold water to flatten it, it would never look like yours—would it, now? Speak truth—gospel truth."

But Joan is happily saved from the necessity of replying to this difficult and delicate query.

"They were the Sardanapalus pigs!" cries Mrs. Moberley in a raised key, reentering the room, flushed with victory, and casting off her water-proof like a tight husk; "luckily it is easy to know them—they are the only Berkshire ones in the row."

## CHAPTER XIII.

A MONTH has crawled away since Joan rang her first timid peal at the bell at Portland Villa. Months have as many different paces as any other time-measures. Some gallop wildly; some trot smartly; some creep on all-fours. This one has been among the slowest-paced. Now it is gone; and—insipidly unpleasant as it has been—there is no reason for rejoicing at its being over; for, as far as human eye can see—as far as human reason can judge—the brothers, that, indefinitely numerous, tread upon its heels, are not at all likely to be more agreeable; except inasmuch as use hardens people to the uncongenial and the unlovely. And the power of use, in this respect, has, Joan is beginning to think, been overrated. Use—twenty-eight, nay thirty days' use—has failed at all to reduce her shrinking from rumpled, stain-freaked table-cloths: at all to decrease her desire furtively to wipe her dull teaspoon before putting it between her lips; in the least degree to lessen the wonder of the problem how Mrs. Moberley came to be her aunt; or in any measure to increase her fondness for amative-military jokes; jokes, not *by* the soldiers—let us do them that justice—but about them.

It is mid-May now, but mid-May not as poets sing it, but with its lovely face puckered and pinched by the spiteful nipping of the east winds. They have been nipping, pinching, withering, for a full week past, and they are nipping, pinching, withering still. Joan, standing by the propped-open window of her little room, and leaning her head against the paintless frame, is looking musingly out, and running over in her mind the little bald incidents of the last four weeks. Thrice the butcher has forgotten, or at least omitted, to bring the meat. Twice Sarah has let fall the tray and smashed four of the soundest cups and saucers, and six of the healthiest plates. Three times the ingenious pigs have lifted the latch and reëntered the garden. Five times there have been warlike gayeties to be staved off; each time successfully, but also each time after a harder battle and giving more offense. Twenty—nay, it is impossible to count how many times Micky Brand has been here, and Wolferstan has been here not at all! At thought of the first of these two names, she, being alone, makes a gesture of impatience and distaste; at thought of the last, she turns away from the window, and taking up a little almanac from the table examines it. Twenty-eight days—exactly four weeks—since they shook hands by that gate, between the waning sun and waxing moon, and he humbly asked permission to come soon again.

She laughs a little derisively. Thank God she did not give it—did not give that unnecessary leave! To grant a favor of which the recipient does not think it worth his while to avail himself, is one of the most considerable among the minor humiliations to which flesh is liable. When one is severed from any state of existence it is useless to try and hang on to it by a single thread. And yet, probably, she herself would hardly have had the courage to cut the thread; Wolferstan has kindly done it for her.

"As I am now henceforth and forever

one of the *bourgeoisie*—one of the minor *bourgeoisie*," she says, relentlessly putting her fate into words, "it certainly is as well that I should receive as few as possible of a fine gentleman's idle attentions; particularly" (smiling bitterly) "as he took such pains to explain to me that they were only idle."

So saying, she takes up a book and buries herself in it until the hour devoted to Diana's instruction shall strike. For Diana has proved herself superior to the force of public opinion—the public opinion of her own circle and family—and, triumphing over, not only her own sense of the unseemliness of voluntarily resuming those leading-strings which two years ago she so joyfully cast away, but over Bell's persistent persiflage, and proving herself invulnerable even by the darts of Micky's wit, now daily sits at the feet of her new Gamaliel, and looks forward hopefully to the time when the next French novel shall be offered for her acceptance, and she will be able proudly to take it, and ostentatiously to enjoy its now occult beauties.

To Joan the two hours devoted to this task are the most bearable in the day. Each exercise of patience, called forth by Diana's dullness; each small, slow victory over ignorance and misapprehension, seems to her a step toward the desired goal of independence and self-maintenance.

If she can teach Diana she can teach others, though seldom, probably, will she meet with a pupil who, to so deep a consciousness of her own shortcomings, unites so honest a determination to be ultimately very learned. The course of study has this morning been in full swing for about half an hour, when Joan perceives, by the wandering of Diana's eyes, the wavering of her color, and the additional stumbling with which she begins to jog through Racine's classic page, that some outside object is distracting her attention.

"What is it?" she cries, a little impatiently; "how you are murdering it!"

"It is Micky," replies Diana, rosily.

"Is that all?" says Joan, carelessly; "I thought that at least it must be the rag-and-bone man! Well—

"'Que vois-je? est-ce Hermione? et que viens je d'entendre?
Pour qui coule le sang que je viens de répandre?'"

Diana complies:

"'Que vois-je? est-ce Hermione? et que viens je d'entendre?
Pour qui coule le sang que je viens de répandre?'"

But, having rendered Orestes's horror-struck question with as little surprise and as much tameness as it is well possible, she again stops. "You do not think that we need go down, then?"

"Certainly not!" replies Joan, shortly; "how many people does he need to entertain him? he has two already—your mother and Bell."

"That is true," says Diana, with an air of reluctant conviction, again limpingly resuming the heroic frenzy of the son of Agamemnon:

"'Je suis, si je l'en crois, un traître, un assassin!
Est-ce Pyrrhus qui meurt? et suis-je Oreste enfin?'"

The house-door has been opened. Micky's weighty foot has been heard along the passage; a louder buzz of talk below tells of the fillip he is giving to the conversation.

"You do not think that he will take it unkind?" suggests Diana, again breaking off.

"It is not of the least consequence if he does."

"No, of course not" (with a sigh).

"'Quoi! j'étouffe en mon cœur la raison qui m'éclaire;
J'assassine à regret un roi que je révère;
Je viole en un jour le droit des souverains,
Ceux des ambassadeurs.'"

"You are to come down-stairs at once, both of you," cries Bell, who, during the

previous lines, having been heard noisily scampering up the carpetless stairs, now bursts into the room, and, both chairs being occupied, falls out of breath on the bed.

"Who says so?" asks Joan, quickly, growing angrily pink.

"Mother," replies Bell, panting and affectedly holding her hand to her heart; "she has been telling Micky about your singing, Joan, and how your 'Barbara Allen' made her cry last night. He says" (laughing) "that he wants to see whether you can make him cry too!"

For the twentieth time Joan regrets the visit of a passing tuner, who by exercising his skill on the cracked old spinet, and restoring their voices to its half a dozen dumb notes, has taken away her best excuse for not trotting forth her accomplishment for the benefit of Mrs. Moberley's warlike friends.

Diana has already jumped up, and, letting Orestes and his frenzy roll on the floor, is standing before the glass, smoothing and beautifying her wild hair with one of Joan's brushes.

The drawing-room door, when opened, discloses Micky stretched at easy length upon the sofa, not offering to help Mrs. Moberley, who is already opening the dusty piano, and trying to infuse a little steadiness into the uncertain music-stool. He is indeed occupied in trying to teach Mr. Brown the well-known accomplishment of "Trust and paid for;" whereof Mr. Brown fully understands and appreciates the last half, but can see neither humor nor point in the first. Joan's entrance frees him from the strain of education, for in a moment his teacher is off the sofa, and advancing with some demonstrativeness to meet her. He is indeed so much occupied by his salutation to his new friend as to omit taking any notice of his old one, which he afterward gracefully explains and apologizes for by saying that he had quite forgotten that he had not seen her before.

"You did not know that I was here, I suppose," he says, confidently glancing from one girl to the other; "did not expect me so early?"

Diana looks foolish; but Joan answers coldly and serenely:

"We saw you coming up the drive."

"They were at lessons," cries Bell, giggling; "two good little girls with their primers and copy-books."

"Have you got to pothooks and hangers yet?" asks Micky, jocosely; but his wit is thrown away upon the object at which it is wholly aimed, as she has joined her aunt at the piano, and is listening to her cautions with regard to the music-stool.

"If you do not lean your whole weight upon it, and if you do not screw it up too high, I think it will hold," she says, gravely testing it with one hand. In obedience to this advice Joan sits gingerly down, and forthwith strikes up the dear old ditty:

"In Scarlet town, where I was born,
There was a fair maid dwelling,
Made ev'ry youth cry well-a-away;
Her name was Barbara Allen.

"All in the merry month of May,
When green buds they were swelling,
Young Jemmy Grove on his death-bed lay,
For love of Barbara Allen.

"Then slowly, slowly she came up,
And slowly she came nigh him,
And all she said when there she came,
'Young man, I think you're dying.'"

Mr. Brand has stationed himself close behind the performer, with his thumb and forefinger on the score, in the full intention of whipping the leaf smartly over as soon as her voice arriving at *ing* shall warn him that it is time. In this well-meant but ill-executed endeavor he only succeeds in felling the music-book to earth. As they both stoop to pick it up, he says to her in a loud, clumsy whisper from among the legs of the piano:

"'Young man, I think you're dying;'

that is just what I can fancy you saying."

For all answer, she hastily resumes her lay:

"When he was dead and laid in grave,
Her heart was struck with sorrow."

"That is the hall-door bell!" cries Diana, interrupting, and pricking up her ears—"surely!"

"Only the area!" answers Bell, shaking her head; "they are so like—three times this morning it has taken me in!"

"O mother, mother, pity me!
For I shall die to-morrow."

Mrs. Moberley has taken out her pocket-handkerchief, being sure that she will soon feel inclined to cry. Regy has half lifted his nose; not quite sure whether the suffering inflicted on him by Miss Dering's melody is acute enough to justify a howl; and Micky has replaced his no-longer-needed thumb and forefinger in his pocket.

But Barbara Allen is fated not to die to-day. Her death-agonies are interrupted by the appearance of Sarah, who now noisily enters; her face capriciously freaked with smuts; and in her hand a bouquet of choice hot-house flowers, which, with a forethought and self-consciousness of dirt not to be too much commended, she is shielding from contact with her dusky fingers, by the interposition of a portion of the tail of her hardly less dusky gown — flowers such as used to be Joan's daily bread; flowers such as she never sees now save in envious dreams. In a moment she is off the music-stool. In a moment they are all up and out of their chairs, and crowding round Sarah.

"Where are they from?"

"For whom are they?"

"Who brought them?"

"As sure as fate it is Jackson!" cries Bell, with a rapturous simper; "the idea of his daring!—and I told him as plainly as I could speak that he was not to do anything of the kind—the youngest subaltern in the regiment!"

Di's big blue eyes are fixed rather wistfully with a faint hope upon Micky's face; but, alas! there is no consciousness on that large and bovine expanse.

"If you please, 'm," says Sarah, as soon as they will allow her to speak—conscientiously holding the nosegay at arms'-length—in order to be able to resist the almost irresistible temptation to sniff its perfume—"if you please, 'm, I was to say that they are for Miss Joan, from the Habbey!"

"From the Abbey!" cries Bell, in a disgusted tone, falling back into her chair, and turning as many colors as a dead mackerel; "then it is not Jackson, after all!"

"Is the colonel down? did he bring them himself? when did he come?" cries Mrs. Moberley, volleying question after question; while the fatness of her cheeks is unable wholly to veil the triumphant fire of her eyes.

"It was not the colonel, 'm; it was one of the grooms!" answers Sarah, delivering up the flowers into their owner's most ready hands, and retreating to the door.

"Did you give him a glass of beer? I hope you gave him a glass of beer!" cries Mrs. Moberley, at the top of her voice; pursuing her now-departed handmaid with a hospitable scream.

"I hope not, for his sake, poor devil!" says Micky, with a noisy laugh; "you must excuse my laughing, but you people really have the worst small-beer in Europe! where on earth do you get it from?"

Absorbed as Joan is in the joy of her posy, she cannot resist lifting her eyes to give him one glance of silent indignation; but Mrs. Moberley begins a weak and long-winded explanation of how it used to come from the Blue Posts; and though it is mostly sour now, yet that the old man is as honest an old man as you would see in a summer day, etc., etc.

Joan has turned away to the window to gloat over her treasures, ashamed that any one should see the joy painted on all her face.

"If it came from Covent Garden," says Di, joining her, "it could not have cost him a penny less than a guinea! Bobby Butler's that he gave Bell for the Fryars' New-Year's Ball came to fifteen shillings! he told me so himself; and it was not half so big or so choice as this."

"A guinea! fifteen shillings?" cries Micky, contemptuously; "you may depend upon it, it did not cost him a penny! of course it came out of their own houses; the only wonder is, that he did not think of so obvious an attention before."

"I wonder," says Bell, advancing with inquisitive haste to join her sister and cousin—"I wonder if there is not a note among them? in novels there always is a *billet-doux* under the leaves—do look, Joan—nay" (giggling, as Joan turns away with reddened cheeks and an angry "Pooh!"), "now I am sure that there is, and that she is trying to find it without our seeing!"

"Examine it for yourself, then!" cries Joan, tragically, holding out her nosegay, yielding it to Bell's ravaging, desecrating hands; and looking on with an inward writhing as her cousin lifts each airy petal, parts each slender stem to peep, and dig, and ferret between. In vain.

"I never can see the object of cramming bouquets full of this stuff!" says Micky, in a hold-cheap voice; spitefully touching with his solid forefinger a fragile spray of maidenhair; "it dies before you can say 'knife,' and shrivels up to an unsightly little black wisp."

"I suppose that we have seen the last of them now," says Bell, with envious tone, reluctantly restoring her scented load.—"I suppose, Joan, that you will take them up to your room now, and keep them there!"

"Put them into your jug," says Di, kindly; "I should—and cut their stalks every day; your room will smell like a greenhouse!"

"Why should I be so greedy?" says Joan, with reluctant magnanimity; "why should not we all have the benefit of them?—that is" (retreating a little, and holding up her hand as a shield against Micky, who is advancing his blunt nose, with the evident intention of burying it among the orchids and gardenias), "that is—all we inmates of the house."

"I wish," says Bell, recovering her complexion and her interest in the subject—"I wish that some one would induce Sarah to be dressed a little earlier than usual to-day; he is pretty sure to look in, in the course of the afternoon, to be thanked!"

"If you want her to be spoken to, my dear," replies Mrs. Moberley, in a whining tone, with her eyes aimlessly fixed on the blind, which is pulled up awry, and on which ancient rain-stains make a yellow zigzag, "you must do it yourself, for I tell you plainly I dare not! it is as much as my place is worth, as they say; she would make no more of giving me warning than I should of blowing my nose! I am sure I do not know what the girls are coming to! As Mrs. Green said the other day, there are no girls anywhere!"

## CHAPTER XIV.

THE next day is Sunday—a day to which Joan has been looking forward with some dread, as it is to witness her *début* at the Helmsley garrison church, which her cousins weekly frequent with pious regularity, winter and summer, come rain, come shine. For the first four Sundays of her stay with them she has succeeded in avoiding this ordeal: firstly, by a headache; secondly, by an ostentatiously-displayed cold; thirdly, by a wet day, and the plea of easily-spoiled crape; and, fourthly, by feigned over-fatigue from a long walk on the previous day. But this morning all these pretexts fail her. She has plainly no cold, nor would it be possible for any one with such clearly bright eyes and such deli-

cately healthy cheeks to lay claim to a headache. It is not raining, and she took no walk yesterday; to worship God with the soldiers must she therefore unavoidably go. Three miles there and three miles back, and for all that distance no more shade than you could cover with a penny-piece. A hot May sun brazenly staring, and a graceless wind catching up the dust in its spiteful hands and thrusting it down your reluctant throat and into your winking eyes. A day like a handsome shrew, goodly to look at, fresh and finely tinted, hateful to feel.

Mrs. Moberley, whose fondness for the military is hardly inferior to that of her daughters, has set off half an hour earlier to "take her time," as she says. By-and-by they overtake her, "larding," like Falstaff, "the lean earth," the wind faithfully outlining her bounteous form as she struggles against it, and her shawl forming a playful balloon at her back—"faint yet pursuing."

As they pass a quiet little church with bells invitingly ringing, Joan makes a despairing stand, weary of the unending struggle with her heavy crape tail, which will decline from her arm into the dust, most weary of the sun, the blast, the audacious fat flies.

"Why should not we go in here?" she asks, looking longingly at the gray walls and the arched door.

"Nobody does," replies Bell, trenchantly quickening her pace; "none of them do. Sometimes they go to St. Chad's in the afternoon because the music is good, but never here"—(nodding contemptuously at the despised place of worship).—"One sees nothing but a few fusty tradespeople."

They have reached the haven at length, and are deposited in a pew, three in a row; Joan, more in accordance with their wishes than her own, between her two cousins, a pew with a first-rate prospect. From it one can see soldiers in profile, soldiers in rear, soldiers in three-quarter. The Misses Moberley, having hurried through their preliminary prayer and smoothed their refractory locks and feathers, are now prepared for devotion and enjoyment; nor are they selfishly anxious to keep either their pleasure or their information to themselves. In whatever ignorance of the domestic details of the 170th Joan has entered the church, they are determined that she shall leave it in no such case.

From the moment of their establishment in the pew she is subject to an alternate nudging and loud whispering into her reluctant ears. "Do you see that woman coming up the chancel in the prune silk? That is Mrs. Simpson; her husband is adjutant. She gave a garden-party the other day, and asked everybody but us. It poured with rain; we were so glad." From the other side: "That is Mrs. Allen in the fifth pew on the left in the side aisle; she never returned our call. She gives herself great airs because the general once sent his carriage for her." This last piece of information is conveyed in so raised a key that Joan looks apprehensively round and cries, "Sh!"

The entrance of clergy and choir causes a slight lull in the conversation. Everybody stands up: in this position many new discoveries, as to who is in church and who is not, are made. The organ plays, the exhortation is read. By-and-by they reach the Litany. With face down sunk on her slender black-clad hands, Joan is joining with more heartfelt earnestness than ever in her life before in the congregational cry of "Good Lord deliver us!" She has a vague feeling that it is from Portland Villa, from Bell, from squalor, from little sordid trials and mean afflictions that she is begging to be delivered. As she so pitifully and yearningly prays, she lifts her face, and her sad look wanders idly round the strange, unfriendly church, and over the many strange, unfriendly faces—they are so many, and not one friend among them all. Her eyes move indifferently, inat-

tentively, from one to the other in lack-lustre survey, when suddenly they stop, and a little flash of clear, bright joy darts into their dolorous blue depths.

Is not that a friend who, so far away, so almost out of sight, so nearly hidden by the intervening red bodies of Micky, Jackson, and half a dozen other light-infantry, is leaning his sunshiny head against a stone pillar in abstract meditation or in sleep? One can see nothing of him but his back—a good, vigorous flat back—and the satiny sweep of his straight, brown locks. Has he come to Helmsley church to be thanked for his nosegay? for it is Wolferstan! No sooner has she recognized him than she stoops her head again, and hides the cheeks that she feels have grown suddenly warmly pink, on her open prayer-book, while above the drone of the clergyman and the monotonous chorister voices she hears the beating of her own loud heart.

"I am too glad!" she says to herself, shrinking frightened from the unused sensation of joy—"much too glad. Why should I be? there is no reason—none!"

Anon she steals another look. He has turned his profile toward her and his roving eye is wandering over the bent heads of the kneeling worshipers in evident search. There is no doubt that it is he: that broad gray eye, bold and mirthful, the clear window to such a goodly prosperous house, the *de coupé* nostril, the *debonnair* lips, the shorn square chin.

"There is no doubt that I am dreadfully glad," she says to herself, remorsefully, "and why in Heaven's name should I be?"

So she resolutely and ruthlessly keeps her eyes hidden and averted from that pleasant sight, nor takes one other glance. That is, not till the very end; not till—at the welcome signal of the benediction—all, both wakeful and sleepful, have sprung alertly to their feet. Then she lets her looks stray hastily once again to the distant pillar. Has he seen her? Probably not. His part of the church is drained by a distant door. He will probably depart without ever having been aware of her neighborhood.

"So much the better," she says, inwardly; but, even while so thinking, her fingers fidget uneasily with her prayer-book. Tall as she is, she raises herself furtively a little on her toes—her one chance of being discovered lies in her height and her black weeds.

"You need not be in a hurry, Joan," says Bell, in a final whisper, noting her cousin's restlessness. "We always let them go out first—they pass by this pew—here they come, how their swords clatter!"

At length—at length—in the wake of many red tunics, they leave the church and reach the porch, only to find it filled with a discomfited crowd. For the face of the day is changed; the brazen sun, the sickly glare, are gone—effaced by one giant rain-cloud which has swept over the sky and is angrily hurling its watery load to earth; the wind, lowered, but not yet sunk, and still spiteful as ever, is driving the heavy drops into the faces and against the Sunday clothes of the shrinking townsfolk in the porch.

Those who, prophetically wise, have brought mackintoshes or water-proofs with them, are complacently enduing them. Those who have not, are enviously eying them. Among the latter class is the Moberley family. No protection whatever against the weather have they, but flimsiest, gaudiest parasols; and on poor Diana's head flourishes the beloved plume of paradise, which, every Sunday, moves from her hat to her bonnet, and every Monday moves back again from her bonnet to her hat.

"It is good weather for young ducks, and that is all that one can say!" says Mrs. Moberley, with her usual slipshod, happy-go-lucky philosophy, gazing at the mad little muddy river which is racing down the church-path.

Joan's eyes are directed—not toward the hostile weather—but toward the people still issuing from the church. Alas! they

have all come forth now; even the galleries and organ-loft are emptied and he is not among them. Her prognostic is fulfilled—he has departed without ever suspecting her nearness. As she so thinks, with a private low sigh, her attention and her eyes are both recalled by a hasty, breathless voice at her ear. It is Micky, who, with rain-drops racing down his nose, with deeper red stains on his wet red tunic, panting, yet triumphant, stands before her with a large umbrella in his hand.

"Miss Dering—you have no umbrella!—I saw that you had not—I have been to fetch one for you—sexton's house—sexton's wife—hold it over you—no chance of its clearing—set off at once!"

"My aunt has no umbrella either," answers Joan, coldly, shrinking back farther into the shelter of the porch.

"What does he care for that?" says Mrs. Moberley, with a good-humored chuckle.—Never mind, my dear. I am not sugar or salt either."

"But Bell—Di—the alpacas!" cries Joan, looking round with hasty wistfulness, and greedily snatching at the nearest excuse.

"I am sorry that I cannot divide myself and my umbrella by three!" says Micky, jocosely, having recovered his breath and his coherence, "but, as I cannot, I must repeat my offer."

"Never mind us!" says Diana, stoically, winking away a very small tear, which had been called into being by the callous indifference to her fate displayed by her old friend. "He is quite right—you are of much more consequence."

"Get along with you!" says Mrs. Moberley, heartily, giving her a little friendly push, never doubting that a compunctious delicacy is the only motive for her niece's hanging back, "we must take our chance, and as to the alpacas—why, your crape would buy them over and over again!"

Thus urged and encouraged by her relatives, what remains for Joan to do but to step out into the large, resolute rain under the ægis of the sexton's wife's roomy umbrella? She does it as loathly as a cat would. Up the swimming church-path, through the church-gate, out into the swimming road. At least the choking dust which rose to one's eyes is changed to mud, which can assault one no higher than one's ankles.

In wrathful—if ungratefully irrationally wrathful—silence, Joan stalks along, and, though his legs are longer than hers, he has some ado to keep up with her without degenerating into a run. At last:

"Do not you think," says Micky, in mild remonstrance—(for, in a *tête-à-tête*, the swagger which the knowledge of the invariable Moberley support and applause alone maintains wholly disappears)—"do not you think that if you walk so very fast you will be out of breath before you reach Portland Villa?"

"Thank you, no."

"Do you call it quite three miles to Helmsley?" pursues Mr. Brand, trying to be conversationally agreeable on indifferent subjects. "I should think that it could not be more than two and three-quarters."

"Quite three—more than three!" replies Joan, with a despondent glance at the long stretch of wet, straight road before her. "I think" (diffidently)—"that if you would allow me to come a little nearer to you I could protect you better; the points of the umbrella are dripping on to your shoulder."

"Thank you!" (very hastily). "It is of no consequence."

"You" (with a good deal of hesitation)—"you would not like to take my arm, I suppose?"

"Thank you, no!"

A silence. Still mightily striding through the storm.

"I wonder what has become of the others?" begins Micky again presently, with an air of complacency. "I hope they are not getting a drenching."

"I do not see how they can well help

it," replies Joan, dryly; "and Diana had a cold already."

"Poor girl!" (in a tone of ostentatious indifference); "how very unlucky!"

Through the bleak suburbs between the scaffolding-poles and the forlorn brick-heaps they are passing, when another noise mixes with that of the rain and the wind in their ears. A noise of wheels coming up behind them—some happy person who has a carriage, and presumably has not a Micky, bowling safely and dryly home from church. As the wheels come up with them their noise ceases. The happy person is apparently stopping beside them. In quick wonder, just flavored with an unlikely hope, Joan looks round, in time to see Wolferstan throwing the reins to his groom, and jumping down out of his phaeton into the mud; on his figure is a wet great-coat, and on his face a rather displeased expression of pleasure.

"Miss Dering, will you allow me to take you home? at least, you will be able to keep yourself drier—may I help you in at once? that is, of course, unless" (with a slight and sulky glance at Micky) "you prefer walking."

"Is it likely?" she answers, with a smile all sunshine—not mixed with sunshine and rain like his; "am I quite a fish, to be so fond of the water?" and so gives him her hand; and setting her light foot on the step springs gayly in, leaving Micky unthanked, alone, with his giant umbrella, in the mire.

How one's point of view changes! Five minutes ago, Joan was ready to maintain that there were nearer four than three miles between Helmsley and Portland Villa; now she is prepared to swear that there are not more than two, and of those two, one, through her ill-advised hasty striding, is already overpast.

"You never walked with me under an umbrella!" is Wolferstan's first reproachful observation, as through the storm they merrily fly.

"It was always fine weather when I was with you," replies Joan; nor, until she has uttered it, does she see the double meaning of the answer.

"Under an umbrella," repeats Wolferstan, frowning a little; the idea evidently rankling in his mind; "there is such intimacy in an umbrella."

"Yes, there is," answers Joan, shuddering a little at the recollection of Micky's eyes amorously glowering at her from beneath the great cotton mushroom.

"What a pace you must have walked at!" continues the young man, still chafing; "whose fault was that—yours or his?"

"Mine."

"You must have run."

"I did nearly."

"I should have overtaken you long ago," says Anthony, with an air of irritation, "only that I was fool enough to wait at the church—I forgot all about that other door."

"You saw me in church, then?"

"Yes, but not till the sermon" (in an aggrieved voice).

"Ah! I saw you in the Litany" (with a soft tone of superiority).

How quickly the horse is trotting! At this rate in five minutes they will be at Portland gate. How smartly they pass through the slackening rain, while the boisterous wind sings with uncouth jollity in their ears!

"What a long time it seems since I was here last!" says Wolferstan, presently, looking affectionately at the wet May garlands in the hedges—at the roadside trees—at the flat green fields.

"Exactly a month—four weeks yesterday," answers Joan. Then, seeing on his face more complacency at the accuracy of her memory than she thinks either wholesome or desirable, she hastens to add: "I have a wonderful memory for small incidents; it is a month since you were here; three weeks since the piano-tuner; ten days since the sweeps."

The complacency disappears, as she had meant it. The greatest coxcomb

cannot be too much exalted by being bracketed with a piano-tuner and sweeps.

"Four weeks, instead of the one that I meant," he says, reflectively. "Do you know why it has been four weeks instead of one?"

"Yes," she answers, sedately, "I know."

"Why?"

"Because you were better amused where you were."

He shakes his head.

"Wrong. Not but what I was very much amused too," he adds, conscientiously; "for the matter of that, I mostly am. For my part" (with a light laugh), "I should like to live forever; the longer my innings are the better I shall be pleased; but that was not the reason."

She is silent.

"Why do not you ask me what it was?" he asks in a sort of pet—"when you see that I am longing to be questioned? You might have the civility to oblige me."

"Suppose that I do not care to hear?" she says, with a small, fine smile.

"Then you ought to care," he answers, gayly. "Whether you care or not you must hear. Are you listening?"

"Yes."

"You know," he goes on, becoming grave and speaking seriously, "I am sure I told you that I have no great belief in myself. I have never had much reason for any; and you disbelieved in me so thoroughly, too, that I thought, perhaps, after all, you might be right."

"Yes."

"Do you know," he continues, reddening slightly and speaking quickly, "I wish you would not make me tell you these sort of humiliating things, but you do. Do you know that more than once I have been ready to cut my throat about a woman on Monday, and by Saturday have forgotten what shape her nose was?"

"I quite believe it" (very dryly).

"I thought—no, I did not think—I had a faint hope that this—this attack might be something of the same kind; at least, thought I, I would give myself the chance—"

"Yes."

"Well, at the end of the first week—"

"At the end of the first week," she says, speaking with a red smile and a pretty curly lip—"at the end of the first week my nose was growing an indistinct memory; at the end of the second week you were not quite sure that I had a nose; at the end of the third week—"

"At the end of the third week," interrupts Anthony, taking the words out of her mouth, and looking down on her boldly and fondly with his happy gray eyes, "I began to blame all eyes that were not blue; and yet it would be monotonous if they were all blue, would not it? At the end of the fourth week I got into the train—*voilà tout.*"

"*Voilà tout*, indeed!" says Joan, with half a laugh, and half a sigh, "for here we are."

It is true. They have reached the gate, through the bars of which six black *retroussé* faces are gravely regarding them. The rain has ceased, the great sun is blithely shouldering aside the sulky clouds, the gutters run less madly down the road, the stooped flowers and the lashed grasses begin to think of raising themselves again.

"See how fine it is," says Wolferstan, directing her attention to the young laugh which is beginning to break gently out over earth's face. "Why may not we lengthen a little our drive?"

"On the other hand, why should we?" she answers.

There is that in her voice which makes him feel that further pressing would be useless; her tone is so low that it is almost drowned by the voices of the dogs, who by this time have issued from the gate, and, thankful for anything which is likely to disperse the *ennui* attendant on Sunday, are giving a hideous out-door concert round the ill-starred vehicle.

Two are jumping teasingly up at the horse's nose, three are making playful snaps at his heels, while Mr. Brown, standing on his hind-legs, in which biped attitude he looks like a very plain man, with one fore-paw on the axle of the wheel, is peering upward with his near-sighted eyes to see who the inmates of the carriage are. In silence Wolferstan lifts his young companion down to earth. She had meant to jump from the high wheel, but he has baffled her by taking her in his arms. He is following her now into the house. Becoming aware of his intention, she turns and faces him.

"You are coming in?" she says, doubtfully, standing in the gateway as if to hinder his entrance.

"I think so," he answers, modestly; "am I not?"

For an instant she stands irresolute: the bluff wind making her heavy gown and her lithe body sway a little, like a tall, pale flower, and the blood sending crimson messages up into her cheeks. Then she speaks.

"If you like, and on one condition."

"What condition?" (laughing); "that it is the last offense of the kind?"

"No, not that."

"What then?"

"You may come," she says, turning her very-much-in-earnest eyes and her face swept by a great carnation flush to his, "on condition that you promise not to stay to luncheon."

He looked surprised.

"I promise."

"However much they may press you?"

"Yes."

"Not pie-crust promise—mind—a real, solemn, binding oath?"

"A real, solemn, binding oath!"

She draws a long breath of relief.

"Then you may come and welcome!"

He laughs dryly.

"You are very hospitable!"

"It is the truest hospitality!" she answers.

## CHAPTER XV.

Accompanied by a vanguard, rear-guard, and body-guard of little dogs, all fantastically dancing round and squeaking with ecstasy over their recovered Joan (for though they sometimes show their affection injudiciously, yet, indeed, they love her very dearly), Wolferstan makes his first entry into Portland Villa. Miss Dering could have wished that the smell of roast-mutton had been less mightily and universally pervasive. The whole house appears to have turned, in honor of Wolferstan, into hot mutton-fat. She steals a covert look at him to see how he is bearing it. Manners forbid him to hold his nose, and so good an actor is he that he seems to be inhaling the warm tallow with no apparent inconvenience or disrelish.

The drawing-room is undoubtedly unchanged since before she went to church, but yet it seems to her a far tawdrier little desert then it did then; the woolly antimacassar more faded, the spar and Bohemian glass more flimsily gimcrack, the dust on the carpet a fathom deeper. She sits dejectedly down on the music-stool. After all, though the music-stool gives one some frights, it is really more dependable than most of the other chairs. He stands on the hearth-rug racking his brains for something complimentary, and at the same time not too flagrantly untruthful, to say about the apartment. As his look wanders round in the vain search for something to commend, it falls on his own flowers, standing in a gaudy jug, and already beginning to yellow and shrivel in this atmosphere of gas and mutton.

"Why do you keep them here," he asks, in a discontented voice, "to be a house of entertainment for every nose in the family? I meant them for *you*."

"Would you like me to keep them in my boudoir?" she asks, with gentle irony. "Do not you know that poor people must have their luxuries in com-

mon? In poverty there can be no privacy."

He looks dissatisfied.

"This is your only sitting-room, then?" in a voice out of which he tries to keep the disgusted surprise.

"The only one."

"You all sit in it always?"

"Yes."

"Mrs. Moberley, the two Misses Moberley, and you?"

"Yes."

"If I came I should find you *all* here?"

"Yes."

A little pause, Wolferstan's eyes uncomfortably taking in the full meanness, threadbareness, vulgarity of the little room. Then he speaks, in a low and almost awe-struck key:

"Every day and all day for the last month, and every day and all day for the next month, and the month after that, and the month after that again—"

"Not all day," she interrupts, gently; "sometimes—often—I sit in my bedroom."

"By way of an improvement?" in quick and ironical interrogation.

"I am rubbing up my old learning, such as it is," she answers, smiling a little, "and one must be alone to do that."

Another little silence.

"Is this to go on forever?" breaks out the young man, suddenly, breathing short and quick as if oppressed by some weight (perhaps it is the tallow that is beginning at last to tell upon him).

"Nothing goes on forever," she answers, gravely. "It is this thought that I think would keep me from being ever too glad, and that now saves me from being too dismal."

He has thrown himself on the little sofa, and, with head down-bent and hands thrust disconsolately through his hair, is staring blankly at the carpet. He looks so thoroughly miserable, that Mr. Brown, who has a kind heart, goes up and begins to lick the end of his nose to comfort him.

"Sometimes," continues Joan, in her soft, sad voice, while her eyes wander idly out through the window to the grass-plot, and the hedge ablaze in new green in the stormy sunshine—"sometimes I wish that I had come here long ago, when I was a child. Sometimes one seems old at twenty; to change all one's likes and dislikes; all one's points of view and habits of thought; but then, again" (shaking her head slowly), "I think that—no, it is best as it is; I have those years always to the good; they are my honey that I live upon now in this my winter."

He has lifted his head, and, as she so soberly and sweetly speaks, an idiotic and unheard-of longing comes over him to snatch her just as she is, sitting poised on her rickety music-stool in all her forlorn black—to snatch, I say, Mrs. Moberley's niece to his heart, and, piling upon her a hundred unseemly fond names, ask her to let him try to make life summer again to her. In order to save himself from yielding to so absurd an impulse, he gets up hastily and walks to the window. Through his heart is blowing as stormy a wind as that which outside is fiercely showing the underside of all the leaves, and making the tree-tops bow and creak. By-and-by he turns toward her, and speaks abruptly:

"Which is your chair, which do you usually sit in?"

"That one," she answers, pointing.

He mistakes the direction of her finger, and is about to sit down on an apparently whole and healthy chair, when the girl's warning cry stops him.

"Not that one, not that one! It is not safe, it has only three legs."

"Then why, in Heaven's name, do they keep it?" asks Anthony, in genuine astonishment, eying the decrepit piece of furniture which has so nearly wrought his woe.

"There are so few without it," re-

plies Joan, humbly, looking ruefully round on the poor and scanty household stuff.

Whether his experience of the one chair has inspired him with a rooted distrust of them all, or whether he fears a recurrence of his former indescribable impulse, is unknown, but he walks again to the window and watches the Campidoglio cat, who, having made herself into an arch, and stiffened her tail to the likeness of a poker, is boxing the angry dog's ears. In a moment, however, he utters an exclamation of astonishment.

"Is it possible?" he cries, turning to her with a vexed expression. "They are back already—how quickly they must have walked! They must have *run!*"

He says it in all innocence, not in any way connecting their speed with himself; but one glance at Joan's confused face, shame-reddened cheeks, and drooped eyes, lets light in upon him. It is to make *his* acquaintance that the dauntless Moberleys have raced through the mire.

In two minutes they are all in the room—all three—yes, even Mrs. Moberley. If she had taken such violent exercise every day for the last ten years, she would not now be the sized Mrs. Moberley that she is.

"How do you do, Colonel Wolferstan?" she cries, advancing with right hand far outstretched, and as much warmth of greeting as if he were a long-lost prodigal son. "Very glad to see you in my house; though it is the first time, I hope it will not be the last by many! You do not know my girls, I think? No? Never happened to meet? My eldest," proudly producing Bell; "my youngest!" affably indicating Di.

"We have often felt as if we knew you," says Bell, in a languishing tone, hazarding a glance of sugared bashfulness, "meeting you so often in society."

"Speak for yourself, Bell!" says Diana, gruffly; "I never thought that I knew Colonel Wolferstan—I always knew that I did not."

"I hope you will always know me for the future," says Anthony, rather embarrassed between an intense inclination to laugh, and as intense a compassion for Joan. "Fortunately, down here I have not a double as I have in London, where, in consequence, I am mostly cut by the people I know, and greeted by the people I do not know."

"How awkward!" sighs Bell. Her head is still on one side, and her voice like that with which the wedded turtle-dove in the wood apostrophizes her mate.

"Micky was in a fine *fanteague* when we met him," says Mrs. Moberley, in a loud and perfectly audible aside to Joan, "at being left in the lurch. Do not think that I blame you, child," noting the crimson distress of her niece's face, and mistaking the cause; "do not think that I blame you! Who would not keep a dry skin if they could?—For my part," turning again to Wolferstan, "I cannot think how you could tear yourself away from town just at this gay time; I can assure you that you will find us all as dull as ditch-water."

"We have not been up at all this year," says Bell, affectedly, as if a season were with her an annual occurrence.

"We never do!" cries Diana, flushing. "Do you know," lifting a large pair of shy eyes to their guest's face—"do you know that I have never been in London in my life?"

"This year, at least, you have no loss," he answers, civilly. "The heat has been something unheard of—ninety in the shade the day I came down."

"You do not say so!" says Mrs. Moberley, in a high staccato key of astonishment. "We have been regretting that we had put up our furs. We should have had them out again only that it seemed a pity to take them out of the camphor." A moment later—"You will stay to din—luncheon, I mean—of course. I must tell Sarah to lay another place; you will hardly believe it, but she would never do it out of her own head."

She is on her way to the door when, mindful of his oath, he arrests her progress.

"Thank you very much—nothing I should like better! but I am afraid it is impossible. I—I—have an engagement at home."

"Now, what engagement can you have on a Sunday?" asks Mrs. Moberley, with affectionate incredulity. "I will not take 'No!' We can offer you only a plain roast leg of mutton"—this information at least is needless—"but I dare say you do not dislike a plain joint for a change!"

"I love it!" he answers, laughing, thankful for even this flimsy excuse to indulge his mirth, which otherwise he feels that he would be constrained to indulge without a pretext. One more glance at the fat pathos of Bell's lackadaisical peony face will, he is aware, be the death of him. But, in mid-mirth, he suddenly stops; he has caught one look of Joan's face—her face of abject entreaty and agonized appeal—and his laughter dies.

Rebutting with civil persistence the importunities of Mrs. Moberley and of her eldest daughter, he is at length allowed to depart.

"Well, we do really know him at last!" cries Bell, with a long-drawn breath of triumph, before he is well out of the room; "what a mercy the rain was!"

"He was laughing so that he could hardly speak," says Diana, in a mortified tone. "I watched him down the drive—he was shaking all over!"

As for Joan, she has rushed up to her room, and, flinging herself on the bed, has buried her miserable, burning face on the little hard pillow.

"It will kill me!" she says, with strangled sobs—strangled for fear of being heard through the thin floor. "It will kill me! as long as they did not know him, it was bearable—henceforth, it will be unbearable!"

## CHAPTER XVI.

Since that dread Sunday, two whole months and one half one have now rolled by. August is come: the month on which our short and chilly summer generally tries to concentrate all its heat.

This year, at all events, the sun seems to have saved all his ardor till now, and to be pouring forth his gathered fierceness on the throbbing heads of man and beast; on the pining flowers, and the dull trees that have lost all the jocund freshness of their June prime. There has been no rain for a fortnight, and every day—every day an untiring, sickly stare of sunshine. Joan's little attic-room, with its low ceiling seeming to press down on her panting face, with its small and blindless window, is nothing short of an oven. Unspeakably she dreads the night, which will consign her to it—the sleepless night, when, gaspingly, with strained eyes she looks for the dawn—the dawn that no bird-voices now usher in. It is only the comfortable sound of the far, cold, plunging sea that seems to keep her alive. How far rather would she lie all night on the burned grass at the sun-dial foot, watched by the cool, kind stars!

"No one who lives in a large house has any idea of what heat is!" she says to herself, sitting nerveless and pallid by the drawing-room window, through which, at the passing of every harvest-wain, or more briskly-rolling carriage, a great choking volley of white dust pours over the hedge and into the room. For a wonder, she has the apartment to herself, and, also, for a wonder she is idle. Joan is not often idle. Witness the frequent darns in the carpet; the new antimacassars; the girls' new bonnets; Mrs. Moberley's new evening cap (less abundantly flowered, of a soberer style of architecture than any of its predecessors); Diana's thumbed lesson-books. For the moment she is absolutely unemployed. Her eyes stray with a wistful languor out

of window to the dancing gnats, and the sere hot herbage, and her figure, which her black gown fits less accurately than it did, leans dejectedly back in her chair.

It is impossible to grow fat upon air; and during this hot weather her palate absolutely refuses the coarse food that is offered to it. Two months and a half, and in all that time not one bright spot! And yet she has seen Wolferstan! How many times? She is too hot to count, but is mistily aware that if she added together the number of their meetings they would amount to a considerable sum. Not one bright spot! She mentally corrects herself. Yes, one! two, even. Once, when suddenly he came upon her, by the wash of the morning waves, and yet once again, when they sat side by side in the wood's green twilight, and looked down the foxglove's speckled throat. But his visits here! Hot as she is, a still hotter flush steals over her body at the recollection.

She sits up and gasps. Which was worse, the day on which Bell asked him for his photograph—forcing her own upon him; or the day on which Sarah emptied all over him the tepid, lumpy, melted butter at luncheon? For her precautions have been vain. He has lunched here; has seen the table-cloth, with its veteran stains; the foggy spoons; the jagged cutlery; has had a cracked plate violently thrust upon him by Sarah's raven-black finger and thumb; and been hospitably overloaded with underdone mutton, which he was equally unable to swallow or hide. His flowers, too! the divine flowers in their delicate plenty that he so often sent her, until one day, with miserable scarlet cheeks and lowered eyes, with halting tongue and broken voice, she begged him to desist.

Flowers are messengers from heaven, but even they may be too dearly bought. They are too dearly paid for at the price of Bell's envious raillery, Mrs. Moberley's jovially hopeful prognostics, and Micky's angry persiflage.

Looking back on the past twelve weeks, what has she left her, but an impression of mortification, onions, and purgatorial heat?

Pshaw! this weather is asphyxiating! She whisks about her pocket-handkerchief in the effort to make a little air-current, but in vain. This is in the morning, and you may imagine that in the afternoon it is not likely to be much cooler. Yet the afternoon sees Joan trudging along the Helmsley road. What was her idle, passive, shielded morning heat compared to her active, sun-struck afternoon heat?

Mrs. Moberley is spending the day with a friend. Bell is in bed with a sick-headache; it seems ill-natured to allow Diana to go alone; and to Helmsley some one must go, to remonstrate with the baker on leaving the establishment breadless.

Oh, why could not he have chosen a cooler day on which to forget their dole of loaves?

In spiritless silence, with throbbing heads and powdery feet, and faint limbs, the two girls take their way along the gridiron of the high-road, their very brains feeling as if they were frying, bubbling, steaming in their heads. They have reached the town, have trodden the hot pavement, have done their errand, have again left the burning flags, and are on their way back again. Di has not even had spirit to peep at the new percales in the draper's window, or give one passing glance to the awkward squad drilling and grilling in the barrack-yard.

Now at least their faces are turned homeward. More than half of their ordeal is over. They are about midway between Helmsley and home, when their burnt and dazzled eyes catch sight of a carriage involved in dust, bowling briskly along to meet them: a well-turned-out London carriage, smart servants, sleek, lofty-mannered horses.

"It is Mrs. Wolferstan!" says Diana, in an excited voice, a ray of life and animation streaming into her scorched,

fagged face; "they have come down then, at last! I wonder will she bow to me?"

The doubt is soon solved. As the barouche flashes past, its sole inmate—a lady luxuriously stretched under a big sun-shade, amid a sea of muslins—leans forward to bow and smile with accented civility.

"Is the world coming to an end?" cries Diana, standing stock-still in the dust, and gazing in astonishment after the retreating vehicle. "Mostly she looks as if she were not aware that there were such people on the earth's face! At this rate, she will probably soon kiss us."

"Was that Colonel Wolferstan's mother?" asks Joan, surprised; having received only a transient impression of white veil, yellow hair, and pink cheeks. "Why, she looked like a *young* lady!"

"I do not fancy that she looks very young when you take her to pieces," replies Diana, sagely. "There's a good deal about her that does not belong to her! I wish," she adds, regretfully, "that it was not so hot! I look so like Bell when I am red; I hope that she did not mistake me for her! Do you think she did?"

"It is not in the least likely," replies Joan, reassuringly, feeling, meanwhile, an inward conviction that to Mrs. Wolferstan's mind the Misses Moberley are a vague fact—a blur, endowed with no separate identity.

At length they have reached Portland Villa, and on entering the drawing-room find it no longer untenanted. Mrs. Moberley has returned. Bell has risen from her bed of sickness. Both are talking eagerly. The cause of the conversation is speedily discovered to be a small, unopened note, which, held between Bell's finger and thumb, is having its superscription eagerly scanned.

On perceiving the two girls, she advances eagerly, holding it out to Joan, and crying:

"You have come at last! how you must have crawled! I could not have borne the suspense much longer; I should have been obliged to have opened it. Mrs. Wolferstan brought it," she goes on, presently, with voluble minuteness; "she came in her big barouche with the C-springs. She did not ask to come in; the footman left it!"

"Of course it is all that good fellow's doing," says Mrs. Moberley, with a familiarly fond allusion to Colonel Wolferstan; "he naturally likes his mother to be intimate with a family that he himself is on such very good terms with."

"And was Sarah," asks Joan, faintly, her mind reverting to that fair being as she had last seen her, in torn apron, dirty cap stuck on awry, and with large smouches of black on her red cheeks—"was Sarah quite as she is now, when Mrs. Wolferstan called?—was her face quite as black?"

Bell nods ominously.

"Quite! Blacker!"

I believe that she does it on purpose!" cries Diana, in a rage.

"Probably," says Bell, her eyes greedily fastened on Joan, who has unfolded the billet, and, with tired white cheeks slightly pleasure-flushed, is reading it—"probably it is to invite us all to their school-feast."

"To luncheon, more likely!" says Mrs. Moberley, loftily; "naturally they wish to repay some of our hospitality."

"We must have a fly!" cries Bell, sanguinely; "we never could walk in this weather—a two-horse fly!"

"I would not order it at once," says Diana, ironically. "I think you will find that our own equipages will be enough to convey us."

"Will you read it for yourselves?" asks Joan, coming to the end of the effusion, and holding it vaguely out to the company generally.

Bell eagerly snatches it and reads aloud:

"My dear Miss Dering:

"Will you overlook the informality of the request, and give us the pleasure

of a visit? Your grandfather and I were such old friends that I cannot feel as if you were a stranger. If it suits you, will you come to us to-morrow for a week or ten days? I will send the carriage for you at any hour you like to name. Hoping that we shall be able to persuade you,

"Yours, very truly,
"SOPHIA WOLFERSTAN."

There is a blank silence.

"Was not it a mercy that we had not ordered the fly?" asks Diana, dryly, breaking it.

"We might not be in existence, for all the mention she makes of us!" says Bell, in a wrathy voice; turning the note inside out to see whether the name of Moberley does not lurk in some overlooked postscript; "not even kind regards, or best remembrances."

"The obligation of our legs of mutton does not weigh so heavily as you thought, mother!" says Diana, who, never having been so sanguine as the others, is now less abashed than they, and can even see the humorous side of the situation.

"A week! ten days!" cries Bell, with an envious gasp, sinking down into a chair and letting her hands fall on her lap; "and the house will either be full of stylish London people, or you will have Anthony all to yourself! I declare I do not know which would be most delightful; what luck some people have!" She pursues, a moment later, with a sound of tears in her voice: "And all through being highly connected. I declare it is enough to make one a radical!"

"Stuff!" cries Mrs. Moberley, crossly, being hardly less disappointed than her daughter, and not averse from wreaking her ill-humor on her fellow-sufferer. "Be thankful for the blessings you have, or as likely as not they will be taken away from you!"

"Thankful for the blessings we have!" echoes Bell, with peevish disrespect; "that is nonsense, mother! We have not any blessings to be thankful for, and you are not in the least thankful for them yourself."

"We have nothing but the cheese-parings and tallow candle-ends of life," says Diana, resignedly; "but then we were meant for them; Joan is not!"

## CHAPTER XVII.

WERE Joan a wise woman she would, as she is well aware, reject Mrs. Wolferstan's overture. When Fate has seated you on a low rung of the social ladder, it is a mistake to allow yourself to be hoisted for a small and transient period on to a higher one. The temporary elevation only makes your low seat the more uneasy to you forever after.

However little acclimatized she may think herself, yet there can be no doubt that three months' wear and tear have a little blunted the first sharp edge of astonished distaste; that at the end of the ten days Sarah will come upon her—Sarah, the smouched and smutted—with the force of a new shock; that Micky, Bell, the table-cloth, will all have to be done over again. And Anthony! To have him all to herself for ten days—as Bell delicately puts it! And at the end of the ten days, for there never yet were ten days that did not end—how will she be feeling?

Ten days of unprotected exposure to the joyful fondness of his faithless gray eyes, to the sugared dishonesty of his smile, to the easy, conscienceless, practised tenderness of his words.

"I never used to be thought susceptible in my good days, never!" she says to herself. "I always laughed at them when they made love to me. At the end of ten days shall I be able to laugh?"

Having thought for a moment and conscientiously answered "No!" she goes the length of writing a note of refusal, which is no sooner finished than it is torn into a hundred fragments.

"I am willing to pay for it," she cries out aloud—she is sitting in her own little

room, her elbows resting on the table, her chin leaned on her clasped hands—"however heavily I have to pay! No musk-plant in a dry summer ever longed for rain as I do for a little happiness, a little enjoyment! I am dying of thirst. I must drink!" So, without giving herself time for reflection, she writes a line of acceptance and sends it off at once, lest she should again change her mind.

So it comes to pass that on the morrow, in the late afternoon, when the sun is beginning a little to relax the severity of his rule, she sets off. The big barouche stands at the door, the tall horses tossing their heads and digging unnecessary holes in the gravel with the hoofs of their supercilious forefeet, her aunt and cousins nodding farewell to her, with mixed envy and good-nature in their eyes.

Mrs. Moberley has indeed soon recovered her good-humor. "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy!" she says, jovially. "For my part, Joan, I am very glad that you should have a chance of shaking a loose leg now and then!"

"I will lend you my gutta-percha beads!" cries Diana. "At a little distance they look just like jet; and though they are rather apt to melt if one gets hot, yet that will not matter to you, as you never do."

"Mind that you notice whether the dinner is carved off the table every day, or only when there is a party!" says Bell.

The last adieux are said; she has kissed all the dogs and told them that she is going to church, which, though not exactly true, conveys the right idea to their minds, viz., that it will be impious to attempt to follow her. Bell's parting adjuration to be sure not to forget to remember them to Colonel Wolferstan, screamed after her, dies away, drowned in the noise of the rolling wheels.

She is off! bowling swiftly along the well-known bit of road, where she has so often slowly trudged with weary feet, less weary than her heart. With the thrifty idea of making the most of it, she leans luxuriously back on the cushions, and, lulled by the smooth motion and the caress of the yielding air, the idea strikes her, "Has it possibly been a most ugly dream?" Is she driving home to Dering to dinner? Will by-and-by the four gray towers rise in familiar solemnity on her sight against the lustre of the opulent sky?

For one happy moment she nurses the idle notion. Then her eyes fall on the men-servants, and the dream dissolves; the liveries are different, and on the buttons the wolf shows his snarling teeth where the Dering lion was wont to ramp. Through the iron gates, between whose bars Diana and she had thrust their envious hot faces, in meagre survey, on the day after her arrival; through the park, where, above the deep-green bracken, high-crowned heads are seen to toss and glance; a glimpse of dazzling garden-squares, and of sunshiny fountains coolly playing; and then, with a sweep, they drive up to the door, and the great bay horses stand still.

There is no need to open the door. It is already hospitably thrown back; and in the aperture stands a man less soberly clad than a butler, less floridly glorious than a footman—a man dressed all in virgin white, like a lily, a *débutante*, or a cricketer. On his feet are cricketing-shoes, on his head brown hair, sheeny as only young hair ever is; on his cheeks and nose a coppery shining, which shows how, through the long summer day, the sun has been doing his wicked will upon him; in his eyes—the only part of his face to which the hot day's work has been unable to do any despite—a great, young jollity and gladness. He is here, then! The ten days have begun. Only ten! one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten!

She is out of the carriage, through the porch, away from the men-servants, in an inner hall before he gives her much gr [illegible] and then—they two be-

ing quite alone, a moderate richly-colored light, filtering through the old and mellow dyes of a stained window, on their heads, and only dead stags' eyes staring glassily at them from the walls—she finds that both her hands are in his, and that he is saying to her most gravely, though with a smile—

"Welcome! welcome! welcome!" three times, and emphasizing each repetition by a little pressure of her fingers. It would be pleasant to leave them in his, where, indeed, they feel most comfortably at home; she therefore instantly withdraws them. "Now at last I believe in your coming!" he cries, drawing a long, glad breath. "I never did till now; there is something shifty and uncertain about you that one cannot reckon upon. I am afraid now to move my eyes away from you, lest when I looked again I should find that you were half-way back to Portland Villa!"

She smiles a little bitterly. "Am I, then, so fond of Portland Villa?" A pause. Her eyes have been resting on the harmonious muddle of the Turkey carpet; she lifts them to his face. "Where is Mrs. Wolferstan? am I not to be introduced to her?"

"By-and-by, by-and-by!" he cries, with impatient gayety, "you have hardly been introduced to me yet. *A propos* of that, can you conscientiously tell me, this time, that you are glad to see me—not as a link, mind—not as a link!—but as myself, as Anthony?" She is silent. "I think you are!" he says, softly and slowly, "though you would be torn asunder by wild-horses before you would own it. Have you made a vow to keep my vanity at starving-point, prison-diet, bread-and-water, and very little of that?" Without waiting for her unready answer, he goes on eagerly: "Then let me tell you that I am glad enough for two, for ten, for twenty. I am inconveniently, unprecedentedly, disagreeably glad!"

She looks up at him with a spirited smile. "Methinks, my lord, thou dost protest too much!" she says, altering the quotation.

"Ay, but I'll keep my word!" he cries quickly, catching it up where she has left it, and altering it too.

She laughs a little. "Where is Mrs. Wolferstan? If you will not find her for me, I shall be reduced to finding her for myself!"

"It would serve you right to let you try!" he says, gayly. "Well! since you do not know when you are well off," leading the way through empty rooms, along cool passages, up steps, down steps, till at length they stop before a door carefully protected by a heavy *portière*. Here they come to a standstill. "You have never seen her?" asks Anthony, in a whisper, with his hand on the curtain.

"No."

"You have not the slightest idea what she is like?"

"Not the slightest," whispering too. "Is she like you?"

He smiles a little oddly. "I do not know. Does one ever know what one's self is like? She does not seem to me to have much resemblance to what I see in the glass."

In another half-moment they are in the room, and Joan is making her bow to Wolferstan's mother. The light is so dim that that which pervades a twilit cathedral at even-tide is garish in comparison. Rigorously closed *persiennes* outside the windows, lowered rose-blinds inside, reduce the August sunshine to a minimum. Through the gloom she dimly sees an uncovered gold head, filleted with a pale-pink ribbon, stooping toward her, and a civil, level, chilly voice saying—

"I hope you are not quite dead with the heat? I hope they have given you some tea!"

"Thank you! I had some before I set off."

"When I last saw you, you were only so high," continues Mrs. Wolferstan, holding a thin, pale hand heavily freighted

with diamonds at a level of about a foot from the floor; "it was at Dering; you used to call me the pretty lady. Do you recollect? No?"

They are seated side by side on a lounge, with their backs carefully turned to the feeble light. Joan's eyes are fixed on her hostess: on the bright locks whose liberal gold has spread even over the parting; on the white-muslin gown, generously open at the thin, unyouthful neck (Joan's own milky throat is clothed up to the chin). She shakes her head. "I do not remember."

"But you did call me so, all the same!" repeats the other, her even voice taking a little sharpness of tone. A moment later, with recovered blandness: "Do you know I rather feel as if we had lured you here under false pretenses? Has Anthony told you we are quite, quite, quite alone?"

Anthony nods. "It is true," he says, laconically. "Do you mind?"

"By-and-by," continues Mrs. Wolferstan, coldly smiling, "I hope we shall be a little more amusing. In about a week we may perhaps find some playfellows. Anthony dear" (with a tart change of tone), "why will you always leave the door open? There comes in such a glare from the passage as I am sure must be blinding poor Miss Dering."

Anthony gets up docilely, and shuts the door, successfully excluding thereby one small, weak shaft of God's good light, which was modestly trying to steal in; and again they sit in complete gloom. Ten minutes later, Mrs. Wolferstan having been summoned away to a colloquy with her maid, Anthony and Joan are again *tête-à-tête*. The moment that this is the case, he cries out in an exasperated voice:

"Why, in Heaven's name, could not you say that you recollected calling her the pretty lady? it would have made all the difference!"

"But I did not!" answers Joan, opening a pair of distressed blue eyes.

"Pooh!" he cries, laughing, yet vexed; "*qu'est ce que ça fait?* Such a fib would have been counted to you for righteousness!"

## CHAPTER XVIII.

The butler's practised hand has made its daily assault upon the Abbey gong; and the four people to whom its loud whirring has appealed are seated round the dinner-table. How delightful to be going to eat one's dinner without having had the whole bloom taken off the affair —without having had its existence forced upon one's notice for three preceding hours by the all-pervasive smell of the rampant onion! There might not be such a bulb in existence, for all that one perceives of it here.

Joan has made her entry into the dining-room, with her hand on the back of a wheeled chair, which is the nearest approach to taking her into dinner of which the master of the house is capable. For he, poor old gentleman, is in very indifferent repair, both of mind and body, and is rolled in, nodding a good deal and smiling foolishly, until snubbed into gravity by an austere valet, who cuts up his dinner and blows his nose for him.

"He only dines with us when we are alone, of course!" says Mrs. Wolferstan, in calm apology; "but I thought you would not mind!—no—it amuses him seeing strangers and talking to them; he will answer you quite rationally sometimes."

So now they are seated, while quiet-footed, swift servants ply them with many palate-tickling dishes. Joan thinks of Sarah laboring round the table in creaky shoes and smutty fingers, blowing the while like an asthmatic grampus, and praises God for the change in her circumstances. For the first time since leaving Dering, she is dining. Scores of

times she has eaten—eaten from a sense of duty, and to keep the wheels of the machine going—but dined not once. Each dish tastes more deliciously than its predecessor; and after a long course of tepid water and sour small-beer, how pleasantly the Veuve Clicquot, daintily sipped, stirs the blood in her young veins!

"I am an epicure!" she says to herself in shocked surprise; "good food or bad food makes a perceptible difference in my happiness! to be, at my age, already a *gourmet!*"

In order to distract her attention from her own gluttony, and relying on his wife's account of his powers of conversation, she hazards a timid observation to her host and neighbor, to the effect that "it is a fine day!" and is much abashed at having her cheerfully-meant remark received with a burst of tears.

"Yes, it is a very fine day!" (sobbing).

In great discomfiture she looks across the garden of late roses, that spreads in red pomp and perfume over the table between them, at Anthony, who nods reassuringly, and says:

"It is all right! he usually does it!"

She wishes that he would not nod; he has a look of his father when he does.

"Were not you very sorry to leave Dering?" asks Mrs. Wolferstan, presently, drawing still more deeply down the already large and opaque candle-shade over the candle nearest her; "but I am silly—of course you were! sweet old spot! I am sure" (with a sigh), "no one can have pleasanter associations with it than I!"

Joan is silent. When her old home is mentioned, she can depend upon neither voice nor eyes.

"Always something doing—something going on there!" pursues the other, her head poised on one side in pensive recollection; "last time that I was there, we got up some tableaux; the very best their kind, I think, that I have ever seen! it was during the visit I was mentioning before dinner—the one that you do not recollect!" (with a faintly-resentful intonation).

Joan is conscious that Anthony is looking at her, with all his imploring soul thrown into his eyes, across the table; that he is even coughing with patent artificiality to attract her attention to this glorious opportunity for re-remembering the so unluckily-forgotten fact. But she lets it slip.

"In one, I remember," pursues Mrs. Wolferstan with a half-smile of complacent reminiscence, "I was the beggar's daughter of Bethnal Green; bare feet, you know, and my hair all loose about my shoulders" (touching them with the tips of her fingers); "the squire himself posed me, dear old man! of course he was not old then! indeed *he* was Cophetua."

"He was always so fond of pretty people!" answers Joan, fixing her grave blue eyes upon her hostess, and wondering whether, at that distant epoch, the shoulders she mentions were as bare of clothes and flesh, and as richly clad in pearl-powder, as they now are; "he liked to have them about him."

"And I am sure that they returned the compliment," answers Mrs. Wolferstan, with brisk cordiality; "at least I can answer for myself, but I have always clung to my elders; it has been my way all my life! I have never cared for my contemporaries!"

Joan looks down at the plump quail on her plate, with rose-reddened cheeks and bitten lips, to repress the laughter rising within her, at the consciousness of the dumb pantomime of applause and approbation which, invisibly to any one but her, Anthony is going through, on the other side of the table, for her behoof. Dinner is over and done with now: nothing but its genial memory left; and Joan stands alone among the garden odors. Her hostess has not accompanied her; whether afraid that the moonlight may

bleach her gold hair, or the night-wind blow the pink from her cheeks, is unknown.

So, by the fountain, with the slumberous tumble of the far salt sea in her ears, and with an enormously long, slim shadow stretching over the fine turf behind her, Joan stands. The fountain is no longer playing. Though the Tritons have their mouths wide open, though the fat Cupids' cheeks are still puffed out, no water issues from their cold stone lips. In the basin the water lies still as death, holding the moon and the constellations on its heart. How plainly mirrored is the fringe of ferns! each frond so faithfully given back. Will she be able to see her own face as clearly? Thriftily lifting her gown, she kneels on the dewy turf; and, leaning over the edge of the basin, peeps. Her face is only a featureless blur. She dips her hand into the water—then her wrist—then almost all her arm. How pleasant to feel the cold flood creeping round it! Then she draws it out, and holds it aloft in the moonbeams, admiring it. What a glorified, pearl-colored limb! and how prettily the shining wet drops race down it! Footsteps make small noise on turf; and, before she suspects it, some one is beside her. Ashamed of being found out in an employment so babyish and so vain, she rises hastily; and trying covertly to wipe her arm on her pocket-handkerchief, without being detected, cries out:

"Did you ever see anything so long as my shadow? it is running up the house! it has reached the second story!"

"It is trying to get in at my windows," answers Anthony, for it is he.

"Those are my windows!"

"Are they? But you need not be conceited about it; mine is quite as tall!" (moving toward her, and standing so close beside her that their two shadows unite and blend into a single whole). "See! we are one!" (deepening the meaning of the trifling, jesting words by the emphasis of his moonlit eyes).

"But we can very soon be two again!" cries Joan, briskly, moving away from him, and turning her face toward the house.

"You are not going in?" he says, in a tone of strong disapprobation, getting ahead of her, and backing slowly before her; "until I came, you were good for another hour's moon-gazing!"

"Another hour! no—another half-hour! perhaps—yes!" (with a fine smile).

"Am I a fog or a miasma, that I should drive you in?" he cries, in an offended voice. She laughs lightly, yet restlessly; and the eyes that, against their will, meet his, are full of an uneasy distrust.

"I do not know! I am not quite sure that you are not!"

They are standing still again. Joan has stopped perforce, seeing that one other backward step will precipitate Anthony into the flamy depths of a geranium-bed. Above their heads a bright half-moon—no crescent—an honest half, as if it had been accurately sliced in two; below their feet the freshness of the hoary dew.

"May I ask, are you apt to catch cold?"

She shakes her head.

"Have you a delicate throat?"

"No."

"A weak chest?"

"No."

"Rickety lungs?"

She laughs a little.

"To save you the pain of further catechism, I will tell you that, as far as I know, I am perfectly sound everywhere!"

"Do you like fresh air?" he goes on, eagerly; "because, if so, let me tell you that in-doors every window is tightly closed—every shutter rigorously barred! Do you like conversation? you will have to do without it! my mother is asleep and dislikes to be waked. Do you like light and occupation? you will get neither! it is one of our manners and customs to grope through our evenings in Egyptian gloom!"

She is silent.

"Not convinced yet?" he cries, in a

tone of impatient astonishment, but half feigned; "then go! buy dearly the experience that I was willing to give you for nothing!"

But, with the permission to go, she seems to lose the inclination.

"What time is it?" she asks, after thinking a moment; "take out your watch! I have not one." Then as he obeys her, and they both stoop over the little disk, "There!" she says, placing one small moonlit finger firmly on a figure on the dial-plate, "I will stay till then!"

"A beggarly quarter of an hour!" says the young man, grumbling; "what can one say in a quarter of an hour?"

"If one speaks quickly one can say an immense number of sentences!" answers Joan, demurely; "thousands, I should think; had not you better begin at once?"

But he seems in no hurry to comply with her suggestion. Slowly, and in a luxury of silence, they step side by side through the windless night. Above their heads in the suave, far sky, God's countless, noiseless armies are all awake and ashine. Thin trails of silvered clouds are flung hither and thither across the deep-blue space. One is even thrown, like a lawny veil, about the moon's face; but it is so transparent, so luminous, that she looks through it with hardly lessened lustre.

Joan's head is thrown back; and her eyes and all her face are lifted upward, seeking, among the numberless battalions of the unknown, the few familiar faces of her shining friends.

"Have you finished counting the stars?" asks Anthony, presently, breaking the silence.

"Not quite!" (laughing a little, but not changing her position).

"There is no hurry!" says the young man, affably; "if you are content, so am I; I am looking at you at my leisure. I am not at all sure that I do not like looking at you better than talking to you; your face is so far gentler than your speech; I am sorry for your own sake that you cannot see at this moment how delicately and neatly your profile is cut out against the sky!"

If he had meant to bring her look down to earth again, he could not have taken a better course. In a moment the features he praises have come back to their usual level, and are turned with youthful severity toward him.

"Have you forgotten our agreement?" she asks, with soft austerity; "have you forgotten that I am a *man*-friend—an honest *bon camarade* to be treated with rational plain speaking, not to be used as a whetstone for banal civilities?"

He nods gravely.

"I have not forgotten, but you must allow that there is a different code of morals and manners for sunshine and moonshine—all day you shall be a man—there! can anything be fairer?—and, as soon as the moon rises, you shall become again a woman—a most womanly woman!" slowly drawing out the last words with a lagging fondness, while his eyes plunge with a passionate audacity of admiration into the chaste deeps of hers. Under that look she turns her small, sleek head about restlessly, and trembles a little, as one afraid.

"I am sure that the time is up!" she says, uneasily; "I am sure that it is more than a quarter of an hour—let me look for myself!"

He takes out his watch, and, holding it up at some little distance from her for the space of an instant, hastily returns it to his pocket.

"Ten minutes more!" he says promptly; "only five gone—I thought so!"

"A very long five minutes!" says Joan, suspiciously.

They have seated themselves on a wooden bench under a tree. From an island of black shade they look out upon a sea of white moonlight. Around them is the perfect stillness that the rich man can make about his dwelling; no noise of

rolling wheels, or of drunken men uproariously singing, which has so often of late been Joan's lullaby; no noise, save only the sea's far speech, its comfortable voice speaking coolly through the sultry night.

"There is one great want in the English language," says Anthony, presently, with apparent irrelevancy; "has it ever struck you? One has to employ the same pronoun to one's sweetheart and one's laundress. One say's to the first, 'You are a darling,' and to the second, 'You have not put enough starch in my collars.' Ought not there to be a difference? Why does not one say 'thou' to the people one loves? I have a great longing to call you 'thou' to-night."

In the heart of this thick-clad tree it is too dark to see clearly, but his voice sounds dangerously moved, and Joan has a dim impression of young and flashing eyes. She laughs coldly and lightly.

"Why do not you, then? Pray do if you like; I am sure I have no objection."

"You have dried up all inclination," he cries, angrily, retiring into the farthest corner of the bench, out of which he had before been making cautious and stealthy advances like a horned snail out of its shell. "As long as I live I shall never wish to call you 'thou' again! if there were any colder pronoun than 'you,' I should make a point of employing it."

She laughs again mockingly.

"He, she, they, it; I give you your choice of them all. I will answer to any one of them."

As she speaks she rises, and, leaving his side, steps softly forth into the moonlight again. They have left the great main garden, with its terraces, its million bedding plants, its ingenious, unlovely flower mosaics. They are in the seclusion of a little ancient parterre that has survived from the olden time. Here formal bed box-edged answers to formal bed. Here the yew-peacock still keeps his shape; here many well-smelling out-of-fashion dwellers in old gardens have taken refuge, watched over by a quiet garden god done in stone, while around a tall trellis, over-flung by clematis, up-climbed by roses, profuse almost as June's, makes a high, close wall.

"We will come here every night," says Anthony, following her, and standing by her side beneath the trellis; "every night I will gather you a bunch of roses." As he speaks he stretches out his right arm far and high, and, plucking bloom after bloom, gives them one by one to her. "Here is one creamy-white like your throat; here is another warmly red as one of your ears is now; which ear is it, the left? ah, then some one is speaking ill of you! what a ruffian he must be! here is another brightly pink as your nostrils were to-day, when the sun shone through them."

"And this?" cries Joan, in a mischievous voice, making a snatch at a deep-yellow rose which droops just above her head—a rose golden-hearted as the yolk of an egg—"which of my features is this like?"

He stops abruptly, and his arm drops to his side.

"I give you up," he cries, in a disgusted voice; "I have done with you; for warping, searing, withering, drying up all a man's holiest impulses, I will back you against any woman in Great Britain or Ireland."

"It is your own fault," says Joan, dropping her rallying tone, and relapsing into gravity; "how many times have I told you that I dislike personal remarks?"

"At least a thousand!" replies the young man, coolly; "and I foresee that you will have to tell me so a thousand times more! What! one may go into any hysterics of admiration that one chooses over a mountain, a sunset, a glacier; and before the loveliest thing God ever made, one must stand dumb—mum-chance!"

"But you do not see me for the first time," objects Joan, mollified in spite of

herself, and smiling slightly; "perhaps I might forgive you, if my beauty" (with a little ironical accent) "burst upon you to-night with the shock of a surprise, but by now you surely have had time to grow used to it!"

"Have I?" answers the young man, with trenchant emphasis, "when, pray? when have I ever had a really good, long, leisurely look at or talk with you? a skimped half-hour here—a meagre ten minutes there—are all the pay I have had for the long and many hours which I have spent sitting on hard stiles and dodging behind prickly hedges to catch a sight of you! You do not believe me!" (noting the gentle skepticism of her slow, moonlit smile). "I give you my word of honor that I know every rung of that ladder-stile that leads into the Helmsley road as well as I know my own features! I could tell you how many bricks there are in each wall of Portland Villa; I know the shape of the chimney-pots far better than I know the shape of my own nose!" Again she smiles, with a small, disbelieving head-shake, while her eyes droop to the fine, drenched sward at her feet, and her right hand slowly waves about her dewy rose-bunch. "And if I came to call," pursues the young man, pricked into greater heat and emphasis by her incredulity, "you know, as well as I do, that I came as often as decency would permit, and several times oftener; what profit had I? Once, after I left, I counted the remarks you had made during my visit; they were five, and, of them, three were 'Yes,' and one was 'No.'"

"Other people were talking," answers Joan, apologetically; "you know that it is only among rooks or geese that it is considered good manners for every one to speak at once."

Anthony is silent, but it is clearly not the silence of conviction.

"You know," continues Joan, deprecatingly, "that to them it is a great treat to talk to you."

"*To them!*" repeats Anthony, with a short and rather offended laugh; "thank you for the emphasis!"

"They so seldom meet a man of your class—of your type," pursues the girl, not heeding his interruption; "and—and—of course they do not know—they do not understand!" A moment later, with painfully hot cheeks and quickened breath: "*A propos* of that, I have a favor to ask of you; now that we are alone I must not lose the opportunity; I want"—(lifting two meek, troubled eyes to his expectant face)—"I want to make you promise never to come and call upon me again."

"*Never to come and call upon you again!*"

"I know," continues Joan, beginning to speak very fast, and still looking at him humbly yet steadily—"I know that you mean it in all kindness and civility, but if you knew" (with an unmistakable accent of sincerity)—"if you knew how I hate your visits!"

"Thank you."

"If you knew how my heart sinks when the door-bell rings for fear that it may be you!"

"Thank you!"

"I grow hot, I grow cold, I choke!" cries the girl, with an accent of deepening excitement; "when I see their unnecessary, overdone effusiveness—their mistaken joy in greeting you—when I watch you with difficulty hiding your mirth! no—do not mistake me" (seeing that he is about to interrupt her), "you do hide it, at least they do not see it; but I!—how can I help it? I divine it, and it suffocates me!"

Anthony is silent; an uncomfortable scarlet silence. Fain would he asseverate that the sight of the Misses Moberley and their mamma has no perceptible effect on his gravity, but the words stick in his throat. Did he swear this till he was black in the face, he knows that she would not believe him.

"Do not think that I blame you!" continues Joan, in a dejected tone, while her unoccupied hand idly strays among

the gray-green sprays and tendrils of the bowery clematis; "were I in your place, no doubt I should not be able to keep my countenance so well as you do; but, things being as they are, they being my very near relatives—my closest kin—you may fancy that it is hardly amusement that I feel!"

Anthony turns away, writhing involuntarily, as the redundant form and overblown face of Bell Moberley rise in awful distinctness before his mind's eye. "If this appalling fact be true, why, in Heaven's name, should she put it into words?"

"As you know," continues Joan, sighing a little, while her downcast eyes still stray sadly over the numberless little white flowers, and the downy fluff of the clematis—"as you know, mine is not a particularly sweet lot! well—when I tell you that each of your visits pours an additional drop of gall into my cup, I am sure that I need say nothing further to persuade you to leave them off!"

She stops: her voice, grown a little tremulous, dies into silence. Nothing breaks the suave dumbness of the night. A very light air has arisen, and is gently swinging the heavy-folded roses and playing over the garden god's cold limbs, the girl's soft face, and the man's troubled one.

As they so stand, Joan resolutely waiting for the answer which Anthony is equally resolved not to give, the stable-clock breaks upon the silence with eleven clear, slow strokes.

"Eleven!" cries Joan, starting; "why does it strike eleven? it must be an hour too fast!" Anthony does not answer, save by a guilty expression of face. "What time is it by your watch? no—I will see for myself this time."

He produces it with some reluctance. The hour-hand points to eleven.

"It was a pious fraud!" says the young man, apologetically, but laughing; "the end justifies the means!"

But the last half of his sentence is addressed to himself or the trellis, for Joan has taken to her heels, and quick as a rabbit is scudding between the high box-hedges back to the house.

. . . . . .

Half an hour later she is standing in her bedroom, lost in honest admiration of the large white bed, the spouted jugs and uncracked basins, the whole and healthy carpet, and the safe-legged, dependable chairs.

"Half a day—a twentieth part of my visit is over!" she says aloud; "there are only nine and a half days left!"

## CHAPTER XIX.

For the first time for weeks, Joan lies all night in cool, deep, blessed sleep, unvexed by miserable hot tossings, by weary waiting for the dawdling clock-strokes as they mark the passage of the sultry night; nor is she awoke by the fierce sun, who is kept at bay by careful awnings and ample blinds. Her drowsy blue eyes first open on the unwonted luxury of a cup of tea brought to her bedside by a trim housemaid, upon whose cheeks no smuts have found a home, and whose gown is absolutely undecorated by rents or grease.

Joan rises gayly with a springy feeling of youth and prosperity at her heart, walks with childish enjoyment barefooted on the thick, soft carpet, revels in the plentiful hot water; and, in utter jollity of mind, makes faces at herself in the glass, wherein eyes, nose, and mouth, are faithfully rendered, undisturbed by any perverting crack. She has put on her gown now—her hot black gown—all her gowns are hot and heavy and black.

"I look as if I had been dipped in the ink-bottle up to my neck," she says, discontentedly. As she speaks her eyes fall on Anthony's roses blooming in a china bowl upon her dressing-table. She takes them out one by one. "This is the one that is like my throat; this is the one

that is like my ear; this is the one that is like my nose—my nostrils, I mean." She sighs a little, and puts them back again. "It would elate him," she says, "and it must be the object of my life to depress him." So saying, and shaking her head, she takes the one yellow rose which she herself had plucked overnight in order to insult her admirer, and fastens it in the breast of her gown. While so occupied a gong sounds. "In any house I have ever visited," she says to herself, "there have always been two, sometimes three, gongs. The first means nothing; the second means prayers; the third means breakfast; I will wait for the third."

In pursuance of this resolve she sits down on the window-seat (alas! that window-seats are so nearly extinct!), and, resting her elbows on the sill, takes her face in both hands, and leans out in leisurely enjoyment of the new morning's well-scented splendors. But by-and-by, as no second gong either sounds or appears to have any intention of sounding, and as many clocks with voices small and big, slow and fast, announce to her from different parts of the house that it is ten o'clock, she rises and goes down-stairs.

There is no one in the large sitting-hall but Anthony, who, lounging in an oak chair, whence he commands a full view of the staircase, is looking up every minute from his *Times* with quick, impatient eyes "gray as glasse." When, at length, Joan comes stepping sedately down, her little pointed shoes cautiously clacking against the low, slippery steps, and one small milk-white hand sliding down the old black banister, he hastily throws away his paper, and comes eagerly to meet her.

"You will never be 'healthy, wealthy, and wise,'" he says. "Do you know that it is ten o'clock; not by my watch" (laughing), "but by Greenwich time? I began to be afraid that you had gone back to Portland Villa. How are you? Shall we come to breakfast?"

"Had not we better wait for Mrs. Wolferstan?" suggests Joan, hanging back.

"We should have to wait some time" (laughing again). "She never appears before one o'clock."

"And your father?" in a rather troubled voice; for will not the presence of even a foolishly tearful, foolishly mirthful, old imbecile be better than nothing as a protection against the dangers of this apparently never-ending, still-beginning *tête-à-tête*?

"My father breakfasts in his own room," replies Anthony, rather shortly, beginning to look a little restive.

There is no help for it. "Fate is against me," she says to herself, and so, without further objection, follows him into the dining-room.

He sends away the servants, and asks her whether she will pour out the tea. They sit opposite to each other in *quasi*-conjugal duet. It is true that at first the urn interposes its large body between them, but by a crafty and gradual shifting of himself and his plate, Anthony by-and-by obviates the difficulty, and commands an unintercepted view of his companion. It is in the morning that youth and complexion tell the most; at night any dingy skin can look white; under the benevolent rule of wax-candles any human buttercup passes for a lily, but not so when the downright sun is searching into the weak places of human countenances, and drawing his absolute line of demarkation between foul and fair. Joan's skin is as clear and fine as privet-flowers; you might look at it through a microscope.

"We have dined together," says Anthony, presently, neglecting his grill and leaning meditatively on his elbow, "and we have lunched together."

"Yes, we have lunched together," replies Joan, shuddering a little at the recollection of Sarah and the melted butter.

"But," continues Anthony, "this is the first time that we have ever breakfasted together."

"Yes."

As he speaks, her thoughts fly back to that day in the wood months ago when he had so earnestly impressed upon her mind the weariness that he would feel in sitting opposite the same woman every day at breakfast. How soon would he grow weary of sitting opposite her? He is not weary yet, apparently. She wishes that he would retire behind the urn again.

"Now how shall we lay out our day?" cries the young man, by-and-by, when, breakfast being at length, to Joan's relief, ended, they stand again together in the hall. "You have absolutely nothing to do; I have absolutely nothing to do: let us enjoy ourselves."

The jollity of his tone is catching; Joan's eyes sparkle with a temperate hilarity.

"Shall we? by all means!"

"But how?" continues Anthony, reflectively. "I know a good many things that you do not like, but very few that you do. You like the sea? shall we have a boat and go out dredging?"

"Certainly not."

"Shall we ride?"

"Too hot."

"Shall we play lawn-tennis?"

"Too hot."

"Shall we go into the kitchen-garden and eat plums?"

"At once? (lifting her eyebrows). "We should never come out again alive."

"I have it!" says Anthony, with an air of inspiration. "There is a lake up among the hills that you have never seen —that I think you have never seen. I will drive you up there in my T-cart; we will fish all day, and come back in the cool of the evening. I will go and tell them to put up some luncheon at once."

He is half-way to the door, when her eager voice overtakes and stops him.

"Impossible! quite impossible!"

"Why impossible?"

For a moment she does not answer, save by the slightly deeper dye that stains the fine grain of her cool cheeks, and her eyes drop to the spotted leopard-skin at her feet. Then she looks up and says gently yet seriously: "You made me uncivil last night, you must not make me uncivil again this morning. I had rather make no plans until I see Mrs. Wolferstan."

"Then you will waste half the day" (in a nettled tone; she is silent). "You might just as well be back at Portland Villa!" (with rising exasperation).

She looks up with a softly conciliatory smile. "Shall I go back?"

But Colonel Wolferstan has his plan a very great deal too much at heart to be diverted from it by a smile.

"We should catch nothing!" pursues Joan, persuasively, looking out through the open windows at the absolute turquoise of the heavens. "Look at the sky! and there has been no rain for weeks!"

"Who wants to catch anything?" asks the young man, laughing petulantly; "of course we should not. I never caught anything there in my life! I do not believe that there is anything to catch; but we should get well away from everybody for the whole day. You have no conception of the loneliness of the place: not a soul ever goes there— we might perhaps see a heron or a carrion-crow."

"It would be hardly worth while going such a long way to see only one carrion-crow, would it?" says Joan with a fine smile.

He makes a gesture of impatience. "You will not, then?"

"Not to-day!" tempering her refusal by the blue sweetness of her eyes.

"It is, perhaps, your last chance!" (with a vexed laugh). "I may never invite you again."

She shrugs a little, and also smiles again.

"No? Then I must imagine the carrion-crow!" He walks to the door, but

this time with no elated hurry. "That is your last word?"

"My last word."

He disappears. She watches him with serenity, feeling sure that the door will shortly open to readmit him. But in this she is mistaken, for time passes, but he does not return. She watches the hands creep round the clocks' faces, and the pendulums tiresomely swinging. In solitude the hours pass; a peaceful, harmonious solitude indeed, soothed by sweet smells and the sight of pretty things; unbroken by the loud wrangling of underbred servants in the kitchen, or the shrill, peevish jars of Mrs. Moberley and Bell, yet still solitude. As he said, she might just as well be back at Portland Villa.

All the clocks, even the slowest, have struck one, and there is yet no sign of her hostess, when Anthony at length reappears.

"I hope it will not inconvenience you," he says, in a rather formal voice, walking over to the window nearest him, "but I am afraid I must pull down all the blinds; my mother cannot bear a strong light. Do you mind?"

"Not in the least!" replies Joan with alacrity, rising and obligingly helping in the sacrilegious task of shutting out all the warm, rainbow-tinted outside glories, and reducing the apartment to a uniform pink gloom.

"There is no accounting for tastes, is there?" says the young man, dryly, when their task is completed; then, in a rather hesitating tone, "Would you mind—do you think you could manage to let her imagine that you *liked* it?"

Having said this he rather hastily goes away again. Shortly afterward Mrs. Wolferstan appears. Rome was not built in a day, nor is Mrs. Wolferstan built in an hour; but now, at length, with every ravage repaired and every breach made good, she enters.

"I am so glad to see that you do not share Anthony's mania for a *glare!*" she says, looking round with satisfaction on the rosy, false twilight; "that, like me, you enjoy a subdued light!" Joan smiles involuntarily. "As for Anthony," continues his mother, "he would live in a glass house if he could; he sleeps with his bed facing the window, and all the blinds drawn up. Can you conceive such a thing?"

Joan can conceive it, for it is the course of conduct that she herself always pursues; but, mindful of Colonel Wolferstan's request, she holds her peace.

"You will not mind my saying so, dear," continues Mrs. Wolferstan a moment later, while her bistred eyes take in the wintry blackness of her young guest's *tout-ensemble*, "but your gown—nothing can be nicer, I am sure—but is not it a little *warm?*"

"Frightfully!" answers Joan, laughing, "but it is the coolest I have. All my clothes are adapted for a polar winter!"

"Would you be angry" (putting her head slightly on one side) "if I were to offer to lend you one of my little morning wrappers—like *this?*" (holding out for inspection the airy fabric of her cobwebby *peignoir*); "they are the comfort of my life; I *live* in them. We are as nearly as possible the same height, I should say" (leading the young girl before a pier-glass). "We must be measured—Anthony must measure us—and not unlike in figure either!" (drawing up her thin neck, and, with obvious dishonesty, standing on tip-toe).

Joan is silent.

"When I married," says her companion, moving away from the glass again, "I could span my waist with my two hands—so!"

"Could you really?" says Joan, smiling. "I should find some difficulty in doing that."

As she speaks she puts her hands on her waist, and joining the finger-tips at the back, laughs to see the very considerable space that parts from each other her small thumbs.

"I believe it was an unusual case," says Mrs. Wolferstan, modestly. "Of course, they said I laced tight; the fact was, that I wore no corset at all!"

"No?"

"Well" (with a sigh), "I am afraid I must not let you make me idle!—letters, you know, and our post goes out early. So sorry to leave you alone! you do not mind? No? That is like me—nothing I enjoy so much as my own society!—'never less alone than when alone.' I am like that. Well, *au revoir!* till luncheon-time."

Nodding and smiling she disappears, and Joan is alone again.

These, then, are all the thanks that she gets for her wasted morning, all the pay that rewards her sacrifice to the conventionalities. Unable to read by the poor modicum of light left, and afraid to pull up the blinds, she creeps behind one of them, and, kneeling on the floor, lays her book on the window-sill, and begins to read. While so occupied she hears the door-handle again turn, and, peeping out from her retreat, sees Anthony looking uncertainly in—half of his body in the strong, white sunlight from the hall, half in a rose-pink bath.

He really must not be allowed to go away again.

"You look so odd and pink!" she cries out, gayly.

The remark decides him, for he comes in and shuts the door.

"The same to you," he answers, advancing toward her; "you will find that we mostly look pink here—*nous autres!* it is a little way we have. Mother not down yet?"

"She came in here about a quarter of an hour ago."

"And went away again?"

"Almost immediately."

A malicious smile curves the young man's handsome lips, even more than Nature has done it for him; lightens also in his clear, steel-colored eyes.

"This is the way in which the Goddess Ydgrun, or Mother Grundy, mostly rewards her votaries, and you see that you might just as well have been obliging, after all."

"Just as well."

"But for you," continues Anthony, incisively, sitting down on a small stool in front of her, also behind the blind, "we should now have been reclining under a large gray rock, side by side, eating *pâté de foie gras.*"

Joan shakes her head.

"I should not; I hate *foie gras.*"

"You would have been eating something else, then; what would you have been eating? *I* should have been eating *foie gras.*"

"Yes?"

"In the brook at our feet—did I mention that there is a brook as well as a lake—a brook ice-cold on the hottest summer day?—a bottle of champagne—"

"*A* bottle!" interrupts Joan, playfully, raising her eyebrows; "why not a dozen?—we may as well have a carouse!"

"By all means. In the brook, then, a dozen bottles of champagne are standing up to their necks; we ourselves couched like ruminating cattle on the heather, which, as you are perhaps aware, is now in full flower; above our heads the birds are caroling their little hearts out."

"Excuse my interrupting you," says Joan, gravely; "but they do not sing a note now."

"No more they do! above our heads, then—"

"The one carrion-crow is hovering," cries the girl, breaking into a laugh, "croaking frightfully."

"Crows do not croak!"

"Is hovering over our heads, then, in utter silence, more alarming than any sound he could make."

"We will not quarrel over details," says Anthony magnanimously; "and since you own that you might just as well have been obliging—you *do* own it, do not you?"

She nods.

"Yes, I own it."

"And, when next I exert myself to make a little plan—"

"I will hasten to meet it!" answers Joan, her blue eyes dancing.

"Come into the garden," says Anthony; "we will seal our reconciliation with plums."

## CHAPTER XX.

Of Joan's visit a whole week has gone; and though the proposed duration of her stay is now increased from ten days to a fortnight, yet there is no denying the fact that even so a full half is already over. Seven such good days! Can the next seven be as good? Hardly. Bell's envious prophecy has been fulfilled to the letter. She has had Anthony all to herself. And now the latter half of the prediction is to be accomplished. To-day the house is to fill with "stylish London people." At the thought Joan's heart sinks. They may be good—these seven new days—but certainly their goodness will be of a different character.

Her mind strays lovingly back over the gone week—her own one week that none can now ever take from her. Breakfast *tête-à-tête* with Anthony; a stroll between the great yew-hedges with Anthony; rowing on the calm, brown river between the banks of flowered bulrushes with Anthony; walking on the firm gold of the sea-sands and gathering long-haired sea-tang with Anthony; eating mulberries with Anthony; quarreling with Anthony; forgiving Anthony; gazing at the planets and the milky-way, and often forgetting to look at them, with Anthony. Adam and Eve in paradise could hardly have had a more absolute duet. For a whole week Joan's biography has been the biography of Anthony; Anthony's biography has been the biography of Joan. How will it be with her life when the Anthony element has been eliminated from it? It is as well to look at these things now and then! For a whole week no one has sought to come between, to interrupt or balk them. Not even Anthony's mother has manifested the smallest surprise or alarm at the unceasing nature of their *tête-à-têtes*.

"It is my insignificance that protects me!" Joan says to herself, bitterly; "I am too entirely undesirable to be even feared, or else" (smiling bitterly) "it is his way!—no doubt it is his way!"

For the first time she has spent a morning without Anthony, and has made the agreeable discovery of how leaden-footed such a morning has become. It has walked away as if it had wooden clogs on. She has passed the hours by the side of Mrs. Wolferstan in the barouche, rolling into Helmsley and back again; along the well-known road where she has so often tiredly plodded in most unwilling pursuit of the military. Every step seems marked by the memory of some mean humiliation or paltry pain.

With a shudder of distaste she looks at Portland Villa as they pass—Portland Villa—from whose windows, for a wonder, no heads are seen protruding; at whose gate no army of tight-curled, bellicose dogs is drawn up in battle array. This phenomenon is speedily accounted for, when, a little farther along the road, they come upon a walking party of five persons, whose advent is heralded by their laughter some time before they come in sight. The procession is headed by Bell and the regimental doctor, who have apparently been playfully exchanging hats; for, as the carriage approaches, there is a friendly scuffle between them to regain each their own natural head-gear. Diana and Micky follow, less playful, perhaps, but still agreeably mirthful; and the rear is brought up by Mrs. Moberley, who follows swainless, half of her gown trailing two yards behind her in the dust, which envelops her in a sort of choky nimbus, and the other half kilted so unintentionally, unnaturally high as to give to view

a great deal of ankle and a broad burst boot, from which most of the buttons are missing.

"Would you like to stop?" asks Mrs. Wolferstan, becoming aware of this remarkable spectacle, and honestly trying to make her words sound as little dissuasive as possible; "no! well, perhaps the sun is rather trying when one is standing still. I have a horror of *coup-de-soleil*, so I see have you!"

As she speaks she gives a civil general bow to the hot-faced, dusty-footed *cortége*, and they roll on. It is clear that this manœuvre is unexpected by the Moberley party, who have drawn themselves up in a row by the side of the road, in evident expectation of a colloquy. Diana, indeed, has slunk a little behind, looking shame-faced, yet excited; but Bell is well to the front, and has already begun a sentence in her resonant, loud voice. Micky has taken off his hat, and is waving it with more than his usual martial ease and assured familiarity; and the doctor is all one friendly grin from ear to ear. Guessing their disappointment, Joan leans out to nod and smile with anxious emphasis, and is thus in a position clearly to see the way in which all their jaws have dropped, and the wrathy astonishment painted on three out of the five warmly-tinted faces; viz., on Mrs. Moberley's, Bell's, Micky's. She sinks back on the cushions with a feeling of keen mortification and suffering.

"They think that I am giving myself airs!" she says to herself; "I, who am indebted to them for daily bread! but oh! I could not—I could not have borne it!"

She is shocked to find how much even a week has blunted her recollection of them. They are so much, *much* worse than she had remembered them; especially, oh! most especially, Micky. Even Mr. Brown's legs are longer, and his tail curls less, than she had any idea of. The impression of the rencontre lives with her all through the rest of the drive, and imbitters it. She cannot shake it off. Not even the sight of Anthony, eager-eyed, awaiting them under the great stone porch; not even the strongly-accented pressure of his hand, as he helps her out of the carriage, can quite dissipate it. There are only six and a half more days on which hers can meet his. After that it will be Micky's, Micky's, always Micky's; Micky whose coarse hot hand ever holds hers so much longer and tighter than it wishes to be held. Later on, even when they are sitting side by side in their wonted place in the warm, green silence of the sleepy wood, the impression still lasts, still stings. It is even deepened and complicated by a new and yet more unpleasant one, left by a few words of Mrs. Wolferstan's.

"What restless people you are!" she cries, as she sees the two friends preparing to steal out after luncheon together, and speaking in a sharper tone than Joan has yet heard her employ, and with a keener look in her stained and bistred eyes than she has yet observed in them; "how unlike me! give me a book—play, poem, essay, what you will—and I never wish to stir from hour's end to hour's end; while you, even in the dog-days, you must always be on the move—on the move!"

"It is cooler in the wood than in the house," says Joan gently, yet persistently; feeling that she will not part company from her last chance of a *tête-à-tête* without a death-struggle.

"In the wood!" repeated Mrs. Wolferstan, raising herself on her white-muslin elbow, and looking pettishly at her son. "Is it possible, Anthony, that you are going to take Miss Dering all through that long tangle of grass and nettles and brushwood?"

"There is no long tangle," replies Anthony, sulkily; "and even if there were, it would be as dry as tow this weather."

"And I am well shod," says the girl, with a deprecating smile, holding up a small shoe for inspection.

"Oh, we see that you have a pretty foot, my dear," says the elder woman, with a rather *aigre-doux* smile. "Are you an Andalusian? Can water run under it without wetting it? People used to be very absurd about my foot once upon a time: I remember one man telling me that he wondered how any grown-up body could be supported on such a tiny pedestal. My boot-maker asked leave to exhibit one of my little boots in a glass case in his shop-window!—too silly, was not it?"

Protected by this fire of complacent reminiscences they move toward the door; but before they are safely through it they are again arrested.

"You will be back in good time, Anthony? you will not be late?"

"Does the tocsin of the dinner-gong ever fail to find us in our accustomed places?" asks Anthony, impatiently.

"The dinner-gong! I must beg you to return long before then! Lalage's train arrives at 5.50."

"*Après?*"

"*Après!* well" (in a tone at once fretful and imperative), "I must request that you are back in time to receive her; she will quite expect it. Do you think" (with a little dry laugh) "that I imagine she is coming to visit *me? pas si bête!*"

They have escaped at last; but it is not the same thing as if they had got away ten minutes earlier.

In a dead, stupid silence they take their way to the green-wood depths. A great stretch of sun-roasted gardens intervenes between them and their refuge. He has unfurled a large green sun-shade, which he holds over her head. It entails such a proximity that they are almost leaning against one another; but still they do not speak. Her eyes are on the burned grass; his are staring out straight before him. They have been silent before now when together, but it was not the same sort of silence.

They have reached the wood. The sun-shade is no longer needed. As soon as its connecting influence is withdrawn they insensibly walk a little farther from each other. They have passed along the winding walk and reached the well-known retired seat: no ornamental chair with writhen legs, but a simple log of wood, over which the mosses have bountifully spread themselves. Side by side they sit, still wordless. High above them the Scotch firs lay their grave, dark heads together, and keep out the sun; at their feet is the veined and patterned ivy; around them a great spread of brambles, with the arch of their mighty crimson stalks and the plenty of their berries; a tangle of greenery, just touched here and there into early fire by the impatient finger of autumn.

"Lalage!" "5.50!" "*Pas si bête!*"

These phrases are buzzing and dinning in Joan's ears, drowning the trumpeting of the loud gnats and the twitter of the happy finches. At last she speaks, without preface, abruptly:

"Who is Lalage?"

He does not answer for a moment. He is plucking sour little wild-strawberries, and eating them; then he speaks in a slow, dreamy tone:

"Lalage is—Lalage!"

"She has a surname, I suppose?"

"I suppose she has!" (absently).

"*Suppose!*"

"What am I saying?" cries the young man, rousing himself. "Of course she has! Beauchamp—that is her name! Lalage Beauchamp. L. B.—I ought to know her initials" (making a face as he throws away his last tart strawberry).

"Beauchamp! oh!"

"Lalage, Lalage!" repeats Anthony, slowly and draggingly, as he clasps one knee with both hands and throws his eyes upward to the tree-tops, and the blue chinks of heaven between; "did you ever hear such a name to give a sober Christian woman? Does not it give one a tipsy, demoralized, Bacchic idea?"

She makes no comment. Her tongue

seems tied up with a tight, uncomfortable string.

"Will you hear the tale of Lalage?" asks Anthony, presently, stretching out his hand to gather a bit of overblown cranesbill, with its little pink stalks and long, sharp noses. "There *is* a tale about her, as you no doubt perceive. I know that you will never be easy until you hear it; and, as for me, you know that I always have a diseased pleasure in relating to you anything that tells to my own disadvantage. Shall I?"

"Yes."

She adds nothing to this short affirmative.

"Well, then — please attend — this is really worth listening to. The last time I saw her—at least, to speak to—I was weeping copiously, and following her round the room on my knees—there!" He is not looking at her; he is looking away from her, perhaps purposely, and she blesses him for it. For the moment she feels that her face has passed beyond her control, and that she has as little power over its muscles as she has over those of his. "Have I quite taken your breath away?" he asks, still without turning his head toward her, but peeping surreptitiously at her out of the corner of one anxious eye.

"Rather!" she answers, speaking as one that pants a little from being carried too quickly through the air, or suddenly plunged into the sea; then making an effort over herself: "You were quite young, perhaps?—a boy?"

He shakes his head. "I wish I could conscientiously say that I was in petticoats; but I am afraid that I was quite as big as I am now. I wore her majesty's uniform; I had cut all my teeth; I was twenty-two years of age. No!—there were no palliating circumstances."

"Followed her round the room on your knees," says Joan, repeating his former words in a stupid parrot-tone, and without the faintest sense of that ludicrousness in the situation which would have struck her so keenly had the case been that of any one else; "and—and—what was she doing?"

"She was laughing immoderately," replies Anthony, a sort of mirth curling the corners of his own handsome lips at the recollection. "Good Lord! how she laughed! and begging me to get up and not make such a fool of myself."

"And did not that cure you?" in a breathless tone.

"Cure me? bless your heart, no! I went on sobbing; you might have heard me from Thames to Tweed. Mine was no silent affliction, I can assure you."

Joan's eyes are fastened upon the broad sheet of big yellow St. John's-worts that help to floor bravely the wood. They are nearly over now: here and there is a broad disk, with its crowded stamens, to which Time delays, saying, "Pass! begone!" Until to-day she has always thought them handsome, joyous-featured flowers.

"On my knees," repeats Anthony with a healthy, heart-whole smile, "as if any woman were ever won by such an attitude! Next time I will go on all-fours."

"Did you know that she was coming to-day?" asks the girl, absently picking a strawberry-leaf, and closely looking with unseeing eyes at its notched edge.

"Until two days ago I had not an idea of it. It is a kind surprise that my mother has contrived for me." Silence—perfect silence—warm, sleepy, fir-scented. "I was certainly very bad," says Anthony, presently, with the sane and wholesome smile of complete recovery still lighting up his face. "I sank so low that I kissed her door-knocker—a grimy London door-knocker. Figure to yourself that! I kissed the area-railings; I think I kissed the butcher's boy."

"And now," says Joan, gallantly striving to speak in a tone of gay and indifferent friendliness as one that relishes a good jest, and to keep wholly out of her face and voice the dull, flat pain that has

taken its seat at her heart—"and now I suppose that it will all have to be done over again. At 5.50" (with a strained smile) "your agony will recommence."

"Will it?" cries the young man, expressively; "on the contrary, I live in hopes of seeing a successor or two vivisected. I have invited a couple of men with an express view to that object. No! no!" (shaking his head with a cheerful gravity); "she will not try that again."

"But if she does try?" asks Joan in a low, quick voice, turning away her face so that he may not see the unseemly greedy eagerness for his answer written on every one of its poor features.

"Let her!" says Anthony, valiantly. "I defy her! Look at me—look at me straight! I do not believe that in your life you have ever looked full at me! There, that is better!" as under the compulsion of his voice she meekly lifts her eyes to his, and in those great pupils he sees himself

"Mirrored small in paradise."

"Let her do her worst—her very worst, and that is pretty bad, I can tell you! No" (with a sudden change of tone), "I will not say that, either; it is bad luck to boast; 'he that thinketh he standeth let him take heed lest he fall.' I am sure that I ought not to fall, for I never think that I stand."

She has dropped her eyes again in irresistible dejection. They have failed to catch any of the confidence of his.

"But without brag," continues the young man, in a brave and joyous tone, "I think I may safely say that if, in the course of the next fortnight, I walk round the room on my knees after any woman, it will not be after her!"

A couple of hours later they are both standing before the closed door of the morning-room, listening.

"Would it be dishonorable to apply one's eye to the key-hole?" asks Anthony, in a tone half humorous, half grave. After a moment: "No, it is not necessary—she has come; I hear her voice. Last time that I heard it I was staggering about as if I were drunk!—do I stagger now? Your necktie is not so white as I was!—am I white now? My pulse was tearing along at a gallop—it hardly trots now; will you feel it!" She shakes her head with a little gesture of refusal. "I will have a bet with you," says the young man, in an eager whisper, "that at the present moment yours is beating more quickly than mine!" As he speaks he takes hold of her small wrist and lays his fingers upon it. "What a weak little quick tick-tack!" he says, tenderly, then, suddenly stooping his comely head, he softly and hurriedly kisses one of the little blue veins, that, like fine threads, wander beneath the cream of her fair skin. "There!" he says, "I am bucklered and panoplied! Let us go in."

## CHAPTER XXI.

"A whitely wanton with a velvet brow."

In the atmosphere of thick darkness with which Mrs. Wolferstan surrounds herself it is always difficult—more especially to one coming in straight from the universal glare of day—to distinguish one thing or person from another. In Mrs. Wolferstan's shrine a young man may always be mistaken for an old woman, a dog for a cat, and *vice versa*. It is, therefore, not quite instantaneously that Joan makes out which of the two sitting figures is the new arrival. A moment, however, decides it. It must be the stranger who, at their entry, rises with supple-jointed briskness, and comes to meet them, stretching out her hands, and crying in a tone of joy and relief:

"Ah! you are here at last; but you have been as long in coming as the millennium. How are you, Anthony? What a long time it is since we have met!—four—five years? it seems like a hundred!"

"Perhaps it is," answers Anthony, readily taking in his both the offered hands, and speaking in a tone and with a laugh in which even Joan's jealous ears fail to detect the smallest grain of fevered unreality or effort. "If it is, we have both worn pretty well, have not we?"

"It is impossible here to see how we have worn!" answers the girl, glancing round discontentedly at the tinted dusk. —"Mrs. Wolferstan, I may pull up one of the blinds, may not I? Why do you keep the room so dark — are your eyes weak?"

Without waiting for answer or permission, she touches the blind-cord, and up springs the red blind, and in flows the golden afternoon light, that has been only waiting outside for the smallest encouragement to pour in its liberal flood.

"Ah, that is better!" cries Lalage, cheerfully. She has taken her ex-lover familiarly by the hand, and has led him into the deep bow of the window, where she is now coolly and boldly scanning his features at her leisure. "I see no crows'-feet!" she says, with a light laugh; "do you? Yes, we have worn pretty well:

'Time writes no wrinkles on our azure brows.'"

For the first few seconds after the upward rush of the blind, an irresistible feeling of fear and repugnance has hindered Joan from looking at her rival. Now, an equally unconquerable instinct of curiosity turns her eyes toward the woman, for whose fair sake Anthony thought it worth while painfully to travel round the room on his knees, and tearfully to kiss an unresponsive door-knocker.

The first glance reveals that she is plump. She has taken that earliest step toward a man's esteem and affection. She looks again. Eyes moderate in size, narrow in shape, but brimful of a cold, quick devilry, sparkling like icicles on a winter's day; a short and rather paltry nose; a skin that by-and-by will be streaky and raddled, but where now carnations lose themselves in milk; a merry, bold, red mouth; a face that, if you take away its coloring, is nothing, that if you look at it in profile is nothing, that if you pick it to pieces is nothing, but which, through sheer gaudiness of hue and splendor of animal life, drives you into hotter commendation than you often give to more real loveliness.

Joan looks away again, utterly unadmiring herself, but with a chill misgiving that her want of appreciation is unlikely to be shared by anything male; flesh and color—good of their kind, and plenty of them—being generally all that is needed to snare the eyes and evoke the encomiums of any member of that simple race. She looks away just in time to catch a glimpse of Mrs. Wolferstan's white-muslin tail vanishing through the door.

"Why has Mrs. Wolferstan disappeared?" asks Lalage, releasing the young man from her scrutiny, and advancing again into the room. "Because I pulled up the blind?—not really?—why, we were all *groping!*"

"She dislikes a strong light," says Anthony, apologetically, stepping out of the window as he speaks, and lighting a cigar as an excuse for not reëntering.

"Rather hard that a whole household should be sacrificed on the altar of one complexion, is not it?" cries Lalage, as soon as he is out of ear-shot. "I have no notion of such selfishness. I shall make a point of keeping that blind—yes, and one of the others too—up during the whole of my stay!"

Joan laughs a little disbelievingly. "Will you?"

"Do you suppose that you and I comprise the whole party?" asks Lalage, lowering her voice a little, and stepping confidentially nearer. "Heaven forbid! There must be some one else coming—some men. I hate a petticoat party, do not you?" Without waiting for an answer, she goes on: "I always think it argues such conceit in people asking you to

meet just themselves—just a family party. I abhor a family party!"

A little silence. To Joan, the problem of the door-knocker is becoming more and more insoluble. In ten years how coarse she will be—she will have three chins! They are already faintly foreshadowed. What a strong-armed lady's-maid—what mighty holdings of the breath must have gone to the making of that nipped-in waist!

"It seems a capital house!" says Lalage, presently, casting a quick and appraising eye round; "are all the reception-rooms as good as this? Better?—bravo! I had no idea that it was this stamp of place at all; Anthony never gave me a hint of it."

Joan smiles sardonically.

"Ah! there is Anthony again!" cries the other, walking quickly back to the window, and beginning to nod her head and smile; "he pretends that he does not see me, but I know better. Dear old Tony! how well he looks! he has filled out since the days I used to know him; those big-boned, gawky boys make the best men after all, do not they?"

"Yes."

"I suppose that no one but me calls him Tony?" says the girl, turning her head over her shoulder to ask the question; "no?—I thought not! Tony Lumpkin I used to call him! How angry it made him! ha! ha!"

. . . . . .

Though it would not seem that such a toilet as Joan's—dead black gown, and live white roses—would take a very long time in making, yet she is quite the last of the guests to make her appearance; entering, indeed, at the same moment as the butler, who announces dinner. It is therefore not till all are seated, drawing off gloves, and making the vital decision between Julienne and Bisque, that she is able to master the details of the party. How different the table looks! so greatly elongated! and how far off Anthony! Old Mr. Wolferstan, his wheeled chair and his austere valet, have disappeared; relegated to an upper chamber. She turns her eyes slowly round the table, examining each face in turn. How familiar they all are, or rather used to be to her! How constantly at ball and drum and dinner has she nightly met them! It seems like coming back from the dead to be among them again. She always used to keep half a dozen round dances at every ball for that big guardsman opposite. He and Anthony were her two favorite partners. She never could quite make up her mind which of the two she liked best. Is that possible?

With a feeling of incredulity, she involuntarily glances again at distant Anthony. He is saying some little gay civil thing to the old woman on his right hand—a real old woman who does not disdain to be an old woman, but wears a real cap with strings, and of her elderly charms judiciously exhibits nothing but face and hands. Finding out by the magnetism which always tells a person, when he is steadily regarded, that his love's fair eyes are upon him, he breaks off in the middle of a sentence to turn his head, and send her down the long table a smile—small enough to travel unnoticed past the intervening guests—large enough to warm her chilly heart. She looks quickly back again at the grenadier. Is it possible? And if the cases had been reversed, if chance had established her aunt and cousins, and consequently herself, at the big guardsman's gates, instead of at Anthony's, would she have loved him instead? Is it such a mere matter of accident?

"Must I always love the man who i[illegible] nearest to me?" she asks herself, with [illegible] feeling of shocked self-contempt; a mo[illegible]ment's reflection, however, reinstates he[illegible] in her self-esteem. "No! Micky is fa[illegible] the nearest to me, and I am certainly [illegible] some distance from loving him!"

She is so busy with her thoughts, th[illegible]t people are half-way through their fish b[illegible]fore she recollects how entirely she [illegible]s

neglecting her own escort. He is a little *attaché* whom she used to snub. Dear me! how many years it seems since she has had the heart to snub any one! With hasty penitence recollecting herself, she makes some slight observation to him, but has no sooner uttered it than she perceives that her remorse has been wasted. He does not even hear her. Between every two mouthfuls he is sending glances, heavy-laden with silent approbation, across the table to Lalage, who, more than ever looking as if she were made out of roses and cream—a great many roses, and a great deal of cream—nearly faces him. To do her justice, she is, for the moment, not thinking of him. She is eating pink salmon, and pondering, with her eyes on the *menu*, as to which *entrées* she will choose, and whether she will be able to enjoy three of them, or had better content herself with two. People are seldom rightly sorted on the first day of a party. They are like odd gloves promiscuously coupled together; two left-hand ones, two right-hand ones.

In the present instance, had they been left to themselves, the guardsman would have chosen Joan and the *attaché* Lalage; whereas now the guardsman has Lalage and the *attaché* Joan. The *attaché* does not care for Joan, and the guardsman does not like Lalage. When the end of dinner frees them from their enforced bonds, the true bent of their dispositions will be seen. Soon seen now; for the ladies have been ten minutes in the drawing-room, and thank God the days of long post-cœnal drinking are over and gone.

Five minutes more will probably bring them; but for the moment they are not come. There is no sound to be heard but the low hum of women's voices, the thin, dry croak of the old ones, and the round, liquid babble of the young. Of the latter, indeed, two are contributing nothing to the conversation. One is asleep, and the other, though wide awake, is dumb.

The sleeping one is Lalage. Immediately on coming into the drawing-room, she has thrown herself into the most comfortable chair in the room—a chair exclusively consecrated to Mrs. Wolferstan's use, and in which it is a point of honor that no one else shall ever sit. It is a long, low fauteuil of peculiar construction, and its position, by a careful arrangement of shaded light above and around it, combines in the highest possible degree the becoming and the luxurious.

"I am afraid that I have taken your chair, have not I?" says Lalage, in a drowsy voice, without offering to move, as she sees Mrs. Wolferstan hover about with wistful and meaning looks, like a bird round its robbed nest; "I am so sorry! you do not mind? no?—well, then, I will not make you uncomfortable by moving, it is certainly very well stuffed; please wake me if I fall asleep!"

"I am glad that you like it!" says the other, with a stunted smile; "it was quite my own idea! I took a good deal of pains about it; Howard himself took my directions, but" (with a little dry laugh) "we all know that my tastes are in many ways rather peculiar; most people—and I fancy you—would prefer one of these others!"

"Thank you, no!" replies Lalage, closing her eyes, and speaking in a voice on which coming slumber is already beginning to tell; "this exactly fits the nape of my neck!"

There is no more to be said, and Mrs. Wolferstan retires discomfited, only to fall into the clutches of the old lady whom Anthony took in to dinner; who, for the punishment of her sins, happens to have been at school with her, and now proceeds to burn her on a slow fire of reminiscences and dates. Joan has placed herself in a little nooky recess by an open window, her body almost hidden by the low droop of an ample curtain, and her cheek swept by the softness of the night wind. It is so soft, it feels like feathers blowing against her face.

"I will not challenge his notice!"

she says to herself with a resolute pride; "I will not be on the lookout for him; if he find me, it shall be because he comes to seek me!"

As the thought passes through her brain the door opens and the men begin to enter. At the first click of the door-handle, Lalage wakes, with no start or suddenness, but with a little rosy stretch and yawn, like a drowsy child. They must all pass by her luxurious lair; she can therefore conveniently pounce upon whichever of them she wishes to engage in conversation. One, two, three, pass by unmolested. Not a word or a look detains them. The fourth is Anthony. Will he also escape? It will not be his fault if he does not. There is no purpose of halting in his face; his quick eyes look ahead of him as one that seeks but has not yet found. But Lalage is not to be balked by any such small impediment. As he passes within a foot of her, she raises herself from her reclining posture, and, stretching out one large white arm, lightly touches him on the coat-sleeve with her fan, looking up in his face the while. She has shaken the sleep from her eyes; nor do they any longer seem to be wanting in either size or sweetness. At the same moment she speaks. Joan is too far off to be able to catch her words; but, by her look, she judges that they are both kind and salted. Perforce he stops. At the same instant, Joan grows aware that her own retreat has become a *solitude à deux*, and that a hearty man's voice is saying to her—

"Where have you been hiding yourself all this year?"

She starts a little, and perceives that the faithful guardsman's body has at length been able to follow whither, all through dinner, heart and eyes had led him, and is now deposited in solid comeliness beside her, with every apparent intention of making a considerable stay.

"Have I hidden myself?"

"I did not meet you once in London this season!"

"I was not to be met."

"Have you already given up the world?" (laughing).

"It has given me up!" she answers, gravely.

As she speaks her eyes again stray furtively away. Lalange is wide awake now; leaning well forward with arms crossed on her lap. She is the only *décolleté* woman in the room; but then, probably, no other woman in the room has such a bust to exhibit. If they had they would possibly be no more backward in advertising it than she. What a neck it is! What a great deal of it! What a smooth sea of pearl! What shoulders! What arms! absolutely unclothed but for the two tiny shoulder-straps, which alone hinder her garment from entirely taking French leave. With a sickening heart Joan takes in these luxurious details.

"There is hope as long as he does not sit down!" she says to herself; "as long as he stands—as long as he stands!"

As she so thinks, there comes a lull in the universal buzz of talk—one of those curious gaps when everybody's ideas seem to fail them at the same moment. Lalage only still speaks, and Joan's sharpened ears have no difficulty in catching her utterance.

"Would you mind deciding whether you mean to go or stay? to sit down or to walk away? I should be glad if you would do either the one or the other!" By the gesture with which she accompanies this remark—a gesture which points confidently to a neighboring chair, it is evident which alternative she expects him to choose. But for once she reckons without her host.

"I will do the other," he answers, lightly laughing, and moving off with a haste somewhat suggestive of a fear of being recalled.

But Lalage does not recall him. She only looks after him for a moment, without anger, but with a little surprised shrugging of shoulder, and raising of brows; then, resettling herself among her

cushions, turns with a contented if sleepy smile to the *attaché*, who has pounced like a hungry hawk upon Anthony's neglected opportunity.

"You are wise," she says, with lazy approbation; "you sit down. I cannot understand any one standing when he can sit, or waking when he can sleep. Can you?" To herself she says, "I shall have more difficulty than I thought in warming up the old broth!"

Meanwhile, the chair on Joan's other hand has become occupied, and in consequence it seems, to her eyes, as if in this dim recess a hundred candles had been suddenly lit.

"A rose between two thorns!" she says gayly, smiling first upon one, then on the other; though, did he but know it, the guardsman's smile is of a poorer quality than the other.

"Do not you think that one thorn at a time is enough for any rose?" asks Anthony, looking across at his fellow-soldier, and emphasizing this broad hint by the urgency of his eyes. He has done his brother-in-arms many a good turn in his day, in the way of backing him up when needed, and effacing himself when not needed; and he thinks the present a good opportunity for exacting a return in kind.

The grenadier looks at Joan. It seems to him, *a priori*, a little unlikely that any woman should wish to be rid of him; but in her eyes, gentle and playful as they are, he can read no slightest desire to detain him. He therefore bows to destiny and goes.

The two friends remain alone behind the curtain. Half an hour later a French window is stealthily opened. Wolferstan is already standing outside on the terrace. Joan hovers undecided on the sill.

"You may set your prudish soul at rest," he is saying a little impatiently; "some one has already broken the ice. See that white gown among the trees! whose is it? which of you wears a white gown?"

Joan looks back over her shoulder into the lit room to see who is missing.

"It is Miss Beauchamp!"

He gives a slight start, then laughs.

"Of course! what a fool I was to ask!"

Without more speech on either side she joins him, and they begin to walk a little, to Joan's surprise, in the direction of the white gown. It is Lalage!—Lalage—on a garden-seat, surrounded by all her little comforts: an escort to keep the gnats away; a little pillow to protect her soft shoulders from the cold iron of the chair-back; a footstool to lift her feet out of the dews.

"Your mother keeps her rooms too hot!" she says, raising friendly, starlit eyes to Anthony. "Why do not you tell her? I shall speak to her about it myself to-morrow; old people have no blood in their veins, I suppose. I was asphyxiated—feel how I burn!"

As she speaks she stretches out her hand to him, and he must needs take it. Joan looks away, conscientiously trying not to observe how long he holds that substantial snow-flake. She is recalled by Lalage's voice, lazy and bland:

."Do you want to sit down?—No?—That is right! there is room for two here, but there is not room for four."

"A hint for us to make ourselves scarce!" says Anthony, laughing; and they move away. For some paces they do not speak. Then:

"And I walked round the room on my knees after her!" says Wolferstan, tragi-comically.

"Yes?"

"To her mind's eye I am always on my knees. I suppose," he goes on, dryly, "she never sees me in any other posture. I must ask her if it is so!"

"Yes?"

It is a little light word, but to her in the uttering it seems long and leaden-weighted.

"I do not mean *now!*" says the young man, rather hastily; "not yet

awhile, but by-and-by—by-and-by—when —when circumstances have proved to her that I can have no desire to repeat the operation."

## CHAPTER XXII.

The night is gone, and another day is come, young, clear, and shining; a brand-new coin fresh from God's mint. There are only six now left to Joan of her visit —only six—and then the deluge; worse than the deluge, indeed, for the deluge was at least a cleanly phenomenon, and Portland Villa is not. Six days! and then the wrecked crockery, the lumpy bed, the affluent dirt, the greasy victual, Bell, Micky! She runs up the scale of her afflictions, and high, high up above all the others sits Mr. Brand in his red tunic.

Of this day, however, not very much has as yet gone—not more than half the morning at least. Breakfast has been over some little time; breakfast—no longer the cozy duet when He and She wooed each other with tea and marmalade. To-day he is almost out of sight, and quite out of speech. However, things might be worse, for he has an old woman on his right hand, and a man on his left, and Lalage does not appear. She prefers the privacy of a heavy-laden tray in her bedroom.

It is mid-day and past when Joan, entering the morning-room, finds her at length descended and engaged in colloquy with her hostess, who has made an heroic effort over herself, and faced the staring, morning sun a good hour earlier than is her wont. It is only for the fag-end of the conversation that Joan comes in. Two of the blinds are drawn up, and Mrs. Wolferstan is sitting in a corner with a hat on and a veil down. She has not been out-of-doors, and is not going.

"There exists no greater advocate for early marriages than I," she is saying in her high, frosty voice; "I mean for men; it keeps them out of—well, we do not know what it does not keep them out of!—it is what I am always preaching to Anthony. He knows my way so well now, that as soon as I begin the subject he—flies! Well" (with a sigh), "I suppose that his hour has not yet come."

"I suppose not," answers Lalage, with a curious smile, as she stands basking in the full stream of the sunlight; "how old were you when you married?"

"I, my dear! do not ask me!" (raising her pale hands with a chilly laugh); "I was a baby—an infant. You would not believe me if I were to tell you how absurdly innocent I was the first time that Mr. Wolferstan saw me. I was in short frocks! positively I was playing with my doll! and yet, curious, is not it? he has often and often told me since that the first moment he saw me he said to himself, 'That is my wife.'"

"And sure enough, so it was!" says Lalage, still smiling, and gently rubbing with one little shoe the back, half shorn, half curly, of a poodle-dog, who is taking a sun-bath at her feet. "What an odd sensation it would be to see a strange man come into the room, and say to one's self, 'That is my husband!' I cannot say that I ever had occasion to make the remark—had you, Miss Dering?"

Joan shakes her brown head, and laughs.

"Never! I should be too much afraid of his contradicting me and saying, 'No, it is not!'"

"It is not fair to ask you these delicate questions in public, is it?" rejoins the other, with a laugh. "Come out on the terrace, and confide in me." As she speaks she puts her hand through Joan's slight arm, and draws her away through the French window, and into the outside air and sun-blaze beyond. As soon as they are out of ear-shot: "Was not that well done?" she cries, triumphantly; "but for my presence of mind we should have remained roasting on the spit of her

reminiscences till luncheon-time. After all, there is nothing like presence of mind."

Joan smiles a little ironically.

"Nothing!"

"If I had staid five minutes longer I should have had to ask her to let me take her to pieces," says Lalage, lowering her voice to a confidential tone. "I long to see how much of her stays on—do not you know?—and how much comes off! My imagination always will take these odious flights; I wish it did not. I never see preposterously fat persons that I do not instantly picture them in their bath!"

Joan smiles, and stoops to pat Anthony's colly, which galloped up, young, rude, and well-meaning, a moment ago.

"She is not a nice old woman!" continues Lalage, curling up her white nose in displeased recollection of her hostess; "far from it! but, even if she were, I should not like her; I dislike all old people!"

"*All?*"

"Yes, all!—now I come to think of it, it is only a very small proportion of the human race that I find agreeable; as I tell you, I have a distaste for old people. No one can really like children, though few have the moral courage to own it; the lower orders are in every respect offensive; and, between ourselves—of course I do not give this out generally—this is quite in your ear—but, between you and me, I am not very fond of the sick and afflicted."

"If I fall ill, then, I will not ask you to nurse me;" says Joan, with a grave smile, gently pulling the dog's ear, as he walks, hot and friendly, beside her.

"No, do not!" answers Lalage, seriously. "I should be so sorry to refuse, but, if you understand, when any one is ill or in trouble, my impulse always is to go away—I dislike seeing it!" A moment later: "The other day I heard of a very religious woman who said that she never saw a cripple without longing to throw a stone at him. Do you comprehend what she meant? No? Well, I do!"

They have left the well-rolled gravel terrace; a simultaneous impulse prompts them to seek a tree's shelter for their uncovered heads. Across the scorched grass, which smells like ready-made hay, they go slowly trailing; a fair white woman, a fair black woman, side by side. Presently—

"How long have you been here?" asks Lalage, abruptly.

"A week—a week yesterday."

"By yourself the whole time? No other visitor?"

"No other."

"A whole week of undiluted Mrs. Wolferstan?" cries Lalage, raising her eyebrows and spreading out her prosperous white hands. "Are you sure that you are really quite alive? But ah!" (correcting herself, and with a meaning look), "of course there were alleviating circumstances!"

Joan looks straight ahead of her, and tries to believe that the flush which she is aware is very considerable when seen in full face may be hardly perceptible in profile. They have reached the shady domain of a great beech-tree. Under his protection they sit down and pant.

"In a week," says Lalage, reflectively, "you must have gone pretty well through her autobiography; you have heard, no doubt, of the time when she could compass her own waist with her finger and thumb?"

Joan smiles reluctantly, "Yes."

"And of the bootmaker who borrowed her old shoe to exhibit in a glass case in his shop-window?"

"Yes."

"And of the clergyman who fell down in a fit and foamed at the mouth in the middle of the Litany, because she came into church in a chip hat?"

Joan shakes her head. "No."

"And of—"

But Joan interrupts her. "Stay!"

she says, laying her gentle hand on the other's lawny sleeve. "You make me laugh against my will; it is dishonest to eat a person's bread, and then ridicule her!"

"Pooh!" cries Lalage airily; "it is not her bread—it is Anthony's; at least that is the way I always look at it. Whosever it is, it is very good bread; I never wish to eat better marrow-patties than those were last night," she adds, thoughtfully. A moment later, looking up discontentedly at the not quite impervious bough-roof above her head: "How much one feels the sun, even here! What a misfortune a thin skin is! I shall be as freckled as a turkey's-egg—you cannot conceive how I freckle!"

"Do you?"

"Oh, if some good Samaritan would but fetch me a parasol—an umbrella—anything—from the house! O Miss Dering" (in a wheedling tone), "if you would but run across the grass—it is not more than a hundred yards—and fetch me one! Your legs are longer than mine—I will do as much for you when I am as slight as you are."

"I will go with pleasure," says Joan, rising with good-natured alacrity; "where shall I find it?"

"In the hall—in my room—anywhere," replies Lalage, vaguely. "But you do not mean to say that you are going really? Yes? That is right. And while you are about it you may as well bring me a hat too—the one with the brigade ribbon—oh! and gloves—a *peau de Suède* pair" (stroking the satiny back of her own hand). "There could not be a deeper depth of degradation than freckled hands, could there?"

Joan is away ten good minutes. Firstly, Miss Beauchamp's maid is not forthcoming; then the hat with the brigade ribbon has mislaid itself; then she forgets the *peau de Suède* gloves, and has to go back for them; but at length, obediently laden with all that she has been bidden to fetch, she returns to the beech-tree seat.

It is empty—Lalage has disappeared Not quite disappeared, either; for, as she casts her eyes round the landscape, Joan sees her late companion slowly vanishing down one of the garden-alleys in the direction of the wood. By her side is a male form which she has no difficulty in recognizing. Indeed, when one is interested in a person, it is singular by how small and distant a portion of him one can swear to his identity. She sits down on the deserted seat and leans her hot face against the cool and smooth beech-bark.

"It is beginning!" she says to herself; "it is beginning!"

She has come hurriedly, and the sun was strong and cruel. She puts up her hand to her head, then passes her fingers over her eyes, which have suddenly grown misty. They are on the edge of the wood-skirts now. In a moment they will have plunged into it, and be lost to sight. But how is this? They have stopped. For a moment they speak together, then the man looks back; not only looks back, but turns back. Not content with quickly walking, he is running over the grass toward her. In a few moments he is beside her.

"You have come to fetch these?" she says, holding up the hat and gloves in one hand, and the parasol in the other, and lifting patient eyes, quite dry now, to his face. "I am sorry that I was so slow, but two or three things hindered me! will you tell her?"

"Tell whom?" asks Anthony, eying the properties offered to his notice with a somewhat puzzled air; "oh! I see!" (a light dawning on his intelligence and flashing in a rather angry smile over his face); "she has been making you her errand-boy! how like her!"

"Her errand-girl, you mean!" says Joan, with a little laugh and shrug; "I did not mind! what does it matter? it is all in the day's work!"

"It is not in *your* day's work!" returns Wolferstan, trenchantly; "I will

not have you made anybody's errand-boy, or errand-girl either! if you run on any more errands you and I shall quarrel, do you hear!"

There is such a tone of authority and appropriation in his voice that her heart gives one great joy-leap, but she answers coolly and lightly:

"I fear, then, that our peace will be of short duration, for I foresee that before ten minutes are over she will send me in again for a neckerchief, or a footstool, or a book; and I am so weak-minded that I shall certainly go! By-the-by, had not you better take these to her at once?" (making a fresh tender of hat, gloves, and sunshade); "she is waiting!"

"Let her wait!" replies Wolferstan, gruffly.

He has sat down; and, having plucked a low, drooping little beech-bough, is fanning the flushed bronze of his face with it.

"You did not come on purpose to fetch them, then?" says Joan, with an unavoidable streak of satisfaction in her voice, as she idly thrusts her fingers into Lalage's too roomy gloves.

"To fetch these?—certainly not! I came to fetch you!"

"To fetch me?"

"Yes, you."

"What!" she says, coloring slightly, "have you never heard that 'two is company and three is trumpery?'"

He laughs.

"In this case the sentiment is as false as the rhyme; in this case 'three is company and two is trumpery?'"

She looks at him with a small, fine smile.

"Are you afraid of a relapse? do you want me to take care of you?"

He is resting his sunshiny head against the beech-trunk, close to hers. Not three inches of beech-bark intervene between the tips of their two noses.

"That is exactly what I do want!" he answers, gravely; and for once his eyes confirm the utterance of his lips; "you have taken the words out of my mouth; but I am not at all afraid of a relapse, thank you!"

## CHAPTER XXIII.

The days darken into nights; the nights slide into days; and now the second week of Joan's visit has gone to join the first. To-morrow, the party is to break up; and every one to go his different way. The hungry past, who is not satisfied with less than everything, whose ever-famished mouth gapes for all our paltry minutes, has swallowed it too. It has not gone quite so quickly as its forerunner, perhaps. It has been fuller of little incidents. In it, there has been less of sweet, swift monotony. Fourteen days. Each night, when she went to bed, has Joan grudgingly deducted one from the poor little sum, and now she has come to the fourteenth and last. In this case, the last has certainly not been the best. It has been a day devoted to an expedition, which, like nineteen out of every twenty enforced pleasure-parties, has turned out a failure. The weather has been disagreeable; the luncheon went astray; everybody has been mismated. Those who have had no desire for each other's proximity have, during a twelve-mile drive, been packed, side by side, knee to knee, in barouche and wagonette. Those who have yearned for each other's society, have seen themselves, hopelessly parted, in separate vehicles. But this abortive *fête* is dead and over now, so one may forgive it. Everybody is dressed, and hungrily looking dinnerward.

"For whom are we waiting?" Lalage asks, in an impatient voice, of Joan, by whom she has seated herself; "it is five minutes past eight! mostly they are punctual: I hate being kept waiting for my dinner, do not you? it takes the edge off one's appetite! Good Heavens!"—in an altered tone—"'who are these like stars appearing?' has dear old Jezebel

hired a company of mountebanks for the evening!"

Joan looks up just in time to see the butler throw wide the high folding-doors, and hear him announce with equal gravity and distinctness, "Mrs. and the Misses Moberley!" She gives a great start, and rubs her eyes. Is it a very odious dream? Not so, Joan! It is a cheek-reddening, heart-sinking, pride-basing reality.

Mrs. Moberley, leading the van and filling the doorway; Mrs. Moberley in cotton-backed satin with gaping placket-hole, and straining seams; on her breast a vast landscape brooch, comprising a castellated residence and three forest-trees in bog-oak; on her head, a large wild cap, once, no doubt, a princely coiffure, but now, through time and ill-usage, reduced to being, like the Coliseum, a superb wreck. Behind her step her two fair daughters, clad in draggling muslin gowns of the strongest possible pink; fans tightly grasped, held upright like sceptres, in their hands; and towering heads that smite the sky, and where all the fowls of the air might roost.

It is clear, indeed, that Diana has reft Micky's bird-of-paradise plume from her hat, and stuck it into her hair, where, in company with a high comb, a nation of beads, and a large bunch of roses, it now waves in sociable triumph. It is no dream. Before they are well in the room, she hears Bell's mighty voice, thrusting itself forward before mother and sister, in exaggerated apology for their lateness. Joan is roused from her painful surprise by a low laugh of zest and merriment from Lalage.

"I do not know which I like best," she is saying, in a choked voice; "the old lady with the timber ornaments is very nice, but I think, on the whole, I give the prize to the young woman with the voice and the cheeks, who looks as if she were sitting for a picture of Eolus!—Why do not you laugh?—do not they amuse you?"

"They are my aunt and cousins—my first-cousins!—I live with them," replies Joan, whitening a good deal, and speaking with a great effort, but quite quietly and distinctly.

"What!" cries the other, glancing hastily at her face, to see whether she is serious, and looking a little out of countenance—"not really?—are you quite sure? how very unfortunate! but it is no use my eating my words, is it?—what is said is said!—I can but request the earth to open and swallow me up!"

At the same moment, Joan is aware that her hostess is approaching, with her usual undulating girl-gait, and with several slips of folded paper in her hand.

"We are going to make a little change to-night," she says with her frozen suavity; "do you mind?—we have no great sticklers for precedence among us, and it is tiresome always to go in to dinner in the same order, is not it?—so to-night the ladies are to draw lots for the gentlemen; will you draw?—it makes a change!" and so passes on to deliver her little address to the next person.

Joan has obeyed; and now, having peeped with trembling quickness at the fateful morsel, crumples it up in her hand. "Wrong! wrong! everything is going wrong to-day, and it is the last day!"

All the ladies are now provided with their slips of paper, and are mastering their contents. Lalage is opening hers with leisurely indifference.

"Heaven send me some one who will let me eat my dinner in peace!" she says; a moment later having learned her fate, she holds out the paper with a half-mischievous smile to Joan, crying, "Shall we change?"

Mrs. Moberley is fumbling for her spectacles, and, missing her pocket, gropes in her placket-hole till dinner. Bell, with craned neck, is sending her dauntless eye round the room in excited inquiry, as to which, of all the equally unknown men, owns the name she has drawn. Diana is flushing uncomfortably, and looking shy. Dinner is announced; and, reversing the usual order of things, there is a stir among

the ladies, and the men stand still. Joan rises and crosses the room with a lagging step—he is a long way off—to her guardsman.

"I believe that you are my fate!" she says, with a not very elated smile; nor does she even hear his expressions of pleasure at his good luck, for her thoughts have traveled away with her eyes, and are following Lalage, as she gayly and briskly walks up to Wolferstan, and putting her hand through his arm, as she looks up in his face with a familiar smile, cries: "Here I am! pray try to look a little pleased."

Bell, having at length mastered his identity, has pounced upon the ill-fated *attaché*, and proudly sailed out with him before half the dowagers.

Mrs. Moberley, still searching for her spectacles, remains seated on her sofa, in hopeless perplexity, until compassionately picked up by a surplus man.

And now the newly-assorted assembly are all seated; and, however ill-paired, have to make the best of each other for the next hour and a half. It is always a rash thing to say that any one portion of one's existence is distinctly the most disagreeable that one has ever spent; but in after-times Joan was wont to think that—(setting aside the great griefs of her life)—there were few portions of her history that she would less soon have over again than that one dinner and August evening.

There is hardly one of the table dispositions with which she is not inclined to quarrel. The person whom she would fain be near is farther from her than any one else. At his right hand, tantalizingly out of ear-shot, but well in sight, sits Lalage, her head wreathed with real vine-leaves, like a Bacchante; Lalage, with fewer clothes and more neck than ever; Lalage making jokes she cannot hear, and shooting eye-shafts that she cannot hinder. Exactly opposite her sits Bell. Within one of Bell, Mrs. Moberley; within one of Mrs. Moberley, Diana. Thus all her relations face her; nor is she spared one humiliating detail of their conduct and appearance. She is recalled from her mortifying reflections by the voice of her neighbor:

"Do tell me about these natives! where on earth did Mrs. Wolferstan pick them up? Did you ever see a more appalling spectacle than the one with the big face—our *vis-à-vis*, I mean? she is out-and-out the worst!"

"They are my aunt and cousins," says Joan, in an extinguished voice, writhing a little. "I live with them."

The young man breaks into a delighted laugh; he thinks it a joke.

"Your aunt and cousins! what a capital idea! had not you better say your mother and sisters at once?"

"But they are," cries poor Joan, in an agony, turning first a painful scarlet, then as white as the table-cloth; "they are my aunt and cousins—my first-cousins—and I live with them! Oh, please understand that I am quite serious! please" (looking round the table miserably)—"please let every one know that they are my relations."

Something in the irritated anguish of her tone at length convinces her partner of his error.

"Good God!" he cries, his mirth suddenly quenched, "how very awful!—I—I—had not an idea—I—really—I do not know what to say—I—I—thought you were joking."

"I know you did," says Joan, gasping a little, and stretching out her hand toward a water-bottle; "but do not ever think so again. I never joke."

They subside into an uncomfortable silence. Joan looks round the table again. When first they had sat down, Anthony had sent her from his distant place a look full of discontent and discomfiture at their separation; gathered brows and downward-curving lips plainly expressing his displeasure. She glances at him now. His forehead is quite smooth, and the corners of his mouth are curling jovially

upward again, according to their merry wont. Lalage is leaning her vine-bound head toward him, and is apparently telling him some anecdote, at which he is laughing immoderately. Probably it is a highly-spiced one, for it is only a strongly-seasoned jest that ever moves a man to such extravagance of mirth. It is of course right and fit that the host should look amiably at, and talk merrily to, such of his guests as neighbor him; but Joan wishes that he did not do it quite so well.

As for Lalage, she looks to-night as if—were she in her right place—she would be dancing and cymbaling, and tossing white arms with fauns and hoofed satyrs, and tipsy wood-gods, down a green forest-glade.

Joan turns her eyes away, and perforce they fall upon her *vis-à-vis*. The *attaché*, through soup and fish-time, has exhibited his distaste for his situation by a sulky silence. He now changes his tactics, and begins to display his ill-humor by indulging in the kindly pastime of drawing out Miss Moberley; an exercise than which he never in his life set himself one easier of accomplishment. Joan would give anything she possesses to be able not to see how fearfully well he succeeds, would readily sacrifice a year of life to be able not to hear her cousin's observations. But it is impossible to put one's fingers in one's ears in a mixed company; and nothing short of that could keep out the sound of Bell's powerful voice, which, as the dinner progresses, grows ever more triumphantly loud. Her giggling waxes more incessant; from her hair, loosened by the continual playful tossings and shakings of her head, the hair-pins begin to drop; excitement, pride, and heat, cause the profound red of her cheeks to overflow her forehead and invade her neck.

At last, when Joan has begun to cast over seriously in her mind whether she cannot feign a nose-bleeding or a swoon, to deliver her from a situation of such wretchedness, Mrs. Wolferstan puts a temporary period to her sufferings, by giving the long-looked-for nod, and they depart. She is standing alone by an open window, leaning her fagged head against the folded shutter, and trying to get the sound of Bell's loud and amorous pleasantries out of her ears, when she is aware that Diana has stolen shyly up to her.

"Are you coming home to-morrow?" she asks, looking diffidently round as if aware that the magnificence of Joan's present surroundings has set a gulf between her and her cousin. "I would not, if I were you; I would stay as long as they asked me; it is worse than ever at home. I think we quarrel more and Sarah sweeps less. I wonder how you will ever bear the change!"

Joan's leaden heart echoes the question.

"How, indeed?"

"You did not know that we were coming to-night!" pursues Diana, with reddened cheeks and mortified eyes. "I saw it in your face the moment we came in; you looked so—so—surprised!"

"Did I?" cries Joan, remorsefully; aware that it is only regard for her feelings which has kept Diana from employing a stronger word.

"A man on horseback—a groom came soon after breakfast this morning," pursues Diana, putting up her hand to her head to feel whether Micky's banner still waves securely from her skull; "he brought a note from Mrs. Wolferstan; she said she hoped we would excuse the short notice and come to dinner to-night; of course" (in an ashamed tone), "I know that they did not want us *really*—of course we were only stop-gaps—some one else had failed them!"

Joan shakes her head dispiritedly.

"I do not know—I have not an idea!"

"How big our heads are!" says the other, presently, in a discontented tone! "they are far the biggest in the room; Bell would have it that it was the fashion to put all sorts of things on one's head at

once; she said that of course the fashion-plate knew better than you! however" (with a sigh), "I dare say it does not matter!—I dare say no one notices!"

Miss Dering wishes from the bottom of her heart that she could echo this hope.

"I wish that Bell would not talk so loud, do not you?" goes on the girl in a lowered tone; "I heard her voice far above every one else's at dinner; some one told me that the young gentleman who took her in was a *lord!* was he really? I am sure that she thinks she has made quite a conquest; but I could see that he was only making fun of her!"

A moment later, in a tone of indignant apprehension: "Mother has gone to sleep, do you see? her cap is all askew; I am so afraid that it may fall off altogether; do you think I might wake her without any one noticing?"

She steps softly away on this delicate errand, and, having succeeded in recalling her parent from the land of dreams, remains beside her to hinder her from returning thither.

On every previous evening of her visit, Wolferstan has, immediately on entering the room, made for Miss Dering as straight and as quickly as if he had been shot out of a cross-bow at her.

He comes toward her to-night also; but it seems to her sad fancy as if there were less alacrity in his step—in his eye a divided allegiance.

He certainly glances once or twice toward the spot where Lalage, in Mrs. Wolferstan's capacious arm-chair, of which she has nightly taken smiling but resolute possession, rests her lazy length.

"How pale you look!" he cries, discontentedly, coming up to Joan; "are you fagged?—overtired? you must be, to look so! I never saw you so white!"

It is far from his intention to do so, but there is something in his tone that conveys the impression that her pallor is not a becoming one.

"Am I pale?" she says, putting up her fingers to her cheeks, as if touch could tell her their tint; "I mostly am now!—I had a good color once, had not I?—a milkmaid's cheeks; but" (sighing a little) "when everything else I had went, that went too! Do not you think it was wise?"

"After all, you are quite red enough!" he says, his eyes straying vexedly away to her three relations, and resting on Bell, who is languishing on the ottoman; two large and well-benzined shoes protruded before her, while the artillery of her eyes plays with incessant but unavailing fury on the distant and unheeding diplomat. "Did you know" (lowering his voice) "that they were to be here to-night?"

"I had not an idea, believe me!" she answers, hanging her head in utter downcastness.

"It is only another of my mother's *surprises*," he says, with a short, dry laugh.

Joan lifts her drooped head.

"Why did she ask them?" she says, in a low, eager voice; "I have been puzzling my brain to find a reason; I am quite at a loss!"

"Are you?" he says, shortly and bitterly; "I am not!" then, a moment later, in a lighter tone, as if making an effort to get the better of his ill-humor, "have you discovered that I am extremely cross to-night?"

She smiles a little.

"I think I have, but do not be cross to-night; it is the last evening!—be cross to-morrow instead!"

He laughs more naturally.

"I have every intention of being cross to-morrow too!"

"Do, by all means!" she answers, gravely; "that will not affect me."

He knits his forehead, and looks puzzled.

"Not affect you! why not?"

"I have not the gift of second-sight," she replies, quietly, "I cannot—being in

Blackshire — observe what your humors are in Scotland!"

His brow grows straight again.

"Oh, I see," he says, in a relieved voice. "To be sure, we are all going to Scotland to-morrow—all of us; of course, of course. Do not you envy us?"

In his eyes, so sombre and thwarted a moment ago, there is a gleam of pleasure and mischief.

"That I do," she answers, wistfully; "it is the first year since I can remember that I have ever missed going. Shall I ever see the moors—the amethyst-colored evening heather again, I wonder?" There is almost a sob in her voice as she speaks; then, as if anxious to disguise and slur over her emotion, she adds quickly: "Miss Beauchamp is going to Scotland too, is not she?"

"Miss Beauchamp too; do you think we would leave her behind?"

There is the same mirth in voice and eye which had before struck her with surprise.

"You will set off quite early, I suppose?" she says, trying by a cool and level tone to conceal the hurt that his light indifference does her. "At cock-crow? before I am up? When I come down I shall find an empty house?"

"An empty house!" he repeats, but he speaks in such a stupid, absent, parrot-like tone, that she sees he has not the faintest idea of what he is saying. Her glance, following his, finds the explanation. It has returned to Lalage, who, looking at him with a laughing audacity over the top of her spread fan, is sending him unmistakable greetings and invitations with her saucy eyes. "Why is she beckoning to me?" he says, fretfully; "she has been making signs to me for the last five minutes. What does she want? I shall pay no attention; there is no reason why I should, is there?"

"That is for you to decide," answers Joan, a little coldly, while her heart, which, through the evening, has been steadily running down like an unwound clock, falls an inch or two lower still.

"I suppose I must, too," he adds a moment later, rising from his seat; "perhaps she may really have something to say to me. I shall be back in a moment. Mind that you do not let any one take my place. There," playfully lifting a bit of her lowest flounce, and spreading it over the chair he has left—"there, if any one offers to usurp it, say that it is engaged." Smiling, he goes, and walks quick, and straight, and comely, across the room.

Joan's eyes and heart see him (though her ears cannot hear) asking for what he is wanted. The answer is apparently satisfactory, for he sits down. Is it worth while sitting down for one minute? The minute passes; lengthens itself to five—to ten. At the end of that time he rises. Is he coming back? The night is yet young; there may yet be a good farewell talk before them—a talk for her to live upon by-and-by. But no, Joan! not so; the evening is to be consistently painful to the end. He rises, indeed, but so does Lalage; and, still talking, they saunter away into the conservatory and are lost among the darkly shining orange-trees.

. . . . . .

"Had not we better ring for our fly?" says Diana's anxious voice, presently, breaking the silence of Joan's now desolate retreat; "our driver is the one that always gets drunk! But Bell will not hear of it; she says that if we go so early they will think that we do not know what is what; but I caught Mrs. Wolferstan giving *such* a yawn just now! I am sure that they are longing to be rid of us."

Joan shrugs her shoulders a little.

"Let them long!" she says, dismally.

Something in her tone strikes Diana.

"Are you coming home to-morrow?" she asks, looking at her narrowly with kind and inquisitive eyes. "I would not, if I were you; and have you enjoyed yourself really—*really?*"

"Yes, I have enjoyed myself," answers

Joan, slowly, while her eyes—a little misty—look dreamily away over Diana's head; "certainly I have enjoyed myself," with emphasis, as if asseverating what another contradicted; "and—yes, I shall come home to-morrow."

A few minutes later the drawing-room door-lock clicks gently, and a black figure flits along the lighted passages, and up the carven stairs Joan has stolen away to bed, but it is one o'clock in the morning before the Moberleys make their bows.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

The emptiness of a small house is nothing. Portland Villa empty is, indeed, far to be preferred to Portland Villa full; but in the wide, cold voidness of a large house there is something that weights the heart and pulls down the spirits.

So Joan feels when she comes downstairs next morning. She had fed, perhaps, a faint hope that some change of plan, some late-sleeping drowsiness, some mis-reading of Bradshaw's dark page may have detained at least one of the travelers. But no! In all the broad and silent rooms, along all the lengthy passages there is no voice nor any step save those of the quiet-footed servants. She breakfasts in absolute loneliness—worse than loneliness, indeed—for, being entirely without appetite, she is continually plied by the butler with hot meats against which her soul revolts, and crumpets which would choke her.

It is, perhaps, unthrifty of her to neglect the last chance of appetizing food which, humanly speaking, she is likely to have for months, or perhaps years. It is certainly unwise to run the risk of arriving hungry at Portland Villa; but the lovesick soul loathes the honey-comb even more than the full one does. By-and-by she goes heavily through the walks, where hitherto she has never gone alone. She says a separate good-by to each special resort—to the wood, to the trellised rose-walks, to the garden god. But she is half sorry afterward that she has done so, for they none of them look the same.

There has been a heavy rain; the narrow wood-paths are drowned, and the strong brambles lay hold on her with rude wet hands—there is now no one to free her from them—the trellised roses are sodden, limp, and overblown; sloppy tears are racing down the god's limbs and running down his nose. Then she packs up her clothes; packing a sigh between each gown; then at length Mrs. Wolferstan makes her tardy appearance.

"They were as nearly as possible late, I hear," she says, referring to her departed guests. "Anthony will always persist in allowing such a narrow margin, and Lalage is an inveterate dawdle! I cannot understand that; can you? I always say" (with her little January laugh), "I have only one virtue, but at least I have that in perfection. I am punctual; never to my knowledge did I keep any one waiting in my life!"

And now Miss Dering is on her homeward road. The fourteen days are over—behind her instead of before. The carriage-horses are drawing her back as cheerfully as they brought her. In her ears still ring her hostess's chill-toned, farewell words:

"So glad to have made your acquaintance. I hope we shall have the pleasure of seeing you here again some day."

Some day! That is substantial food for a hungry heart, is not it? Before her mind's eye she still sees the tepid civility of Mrs. Wolferstan's good-by smile. She has reached the gate of Portland Villa. The ragged string which ties gate and gate-post together, to the confusion of the Sardanapalus pigs, has twisted itself into a knot. The footman fumbles with it for ten minutes before he conquers it. But at last the carriage rolls in, rolls up to the door, and the footman boldly pulls the bell. Let him pull. Is it not broken?

On the seldom-scoured door-step the

dogs' muddy paws have wrought many ingenious patterns — only to be erased, probably, by the action of time—and, also, on the door-step crowd all the dogs themselves. Carriage-company is not common at Portland Villa, and always wildly excites them. They will hardly let her get out, and, when at last she has succeeded in descending among them, each greets her in his own fashion. Regy—a kind and conscientious dog, but not gifted with much insight into character — evidently mistakes her for his enemy the butcher's boy, who also arrives in a carriage, or at least a species of one. This is clear by the tone of his bark and the bristled roughness of his hostile back. Algy having smelt her carefully all over, so as to insure not being led away by a superficial resemblance, gives her a temperate welcome; but Mr. Brown knows her in a minute. He trusts neither to his nose nor to his short-sighted eyes. His heart tells him that it is Joan. He is not quite so clean as could be wished, as he has clearly been indulging lately in the not uncommon luxury of a roll in the ash-pit, but what his greeting wants in cleanliness it makes up in warmth. She stoops down and kisses him. He is certainly like Anthony's dog—a humble, vulgarized likeness—but still like. Walking along beside her, almost entirely on his hind-legs, in a way which would make his fortune were he a professional dog, he escorts her into the drawing-room and introduces her to the family, for they are all three there; all with their backs turned to her and their noses flattened against the shut window, in eager and reverent survey of the departing Wolferstan equipage.

"If he has not left the gate untied!" cries Mrs. Moberley, in accents of high indignation; "and now the pigs will be in before you can say 'Knife!' Just like a servant, anything to save himself trouble!"

At the sound of Joan's step they all turn and greet her after their several manners, and so absorbing is the interest that her return occasions, that, though two minutes later the pigs, watching their opportunity, unlatch the gate and enter, numerous as talkative, they remain quite unnoticed and undisturbed.

"You were not asked to stay, I suppose?" says Bell, with a laugh, as she stretches her copious form on the little couch, and prepares to take part, at luxurious ease, in high converse about the aristocracy.

Joan opens her blue eyes.

"*To stay!* how do you mean? I staid a fortnight."

"I mean for good, of course!" rejoins her cousin, still laughing, and with a playful emphasis on the two important words. "Anthony did not ask you to stay?"

"Pooh! pooh!" cries Mrs. Moberley, chidingly; "do not put notions into the girl's head! it did not require spectacles to see which way the colonel was looking.—I never made out her name, Joan; that stout girl with a fresh color—dear me! she *was* stout!—she beat you, Bell!"

"She looked one of the Upper Ten all the same!" replies Bell; "after all, you cannot mistake them!"

"I cannot say that you look much the better for your out!" says Mrs. Moberley, reseating upon her nose the spectacles which, pushed up on her forehead, have been enjoying a season of rest and inaction, and regarding her niece somewhat narrowly through them. "I dare say all those kickshaws did not agree with you; after all, there is nothing like a plain roast joint with the gravy in it; all the doctors tell you so!"

"How low you must feel!" says Bell, pensively; "I can sympathize with you; I feel as flat as flat myself this morning! that is the worst of that kind of society; it spoils you for all other!"

"Speak for yourself!" cries Diana, in her high, honest voice, while her healthy cheeks take a deeper tinge than even youth, country air, and a good digestion, have given them; "as for me, I never

spent such a wretched evening in my life! I do not know which I was most ashamed of—myself, or you, or mother!—what fishes out of water we looked!—now did not we, Joan?"

Miss Dering is delivered from the delicate dilemma in which this question places her, by Mrs. Moberley, who makes a peaceable diversion by saying:

"Talking of fishes, I do wish, Joan, that you could get us the recipe of that sauce they served with the mullet last night; I declare I see no reason why Jane should not try her hand at it; of course, you know old Mrs. Wolferstan well enough by this time not to mind mentioning it to her; indeed, many people take it as a compliment to be asked for their recipes!"

Joan gives a sort of gasp. Perhaps it is the confined atmosphere of the room—the Moberleys are not fond of air, and the window is closed—which makes her do so. It is the last straw which breaks the camel's back, though under many of the previous ones it has been cracking; and (although, in reading of it, the cause seems absurdly disproportioned to the effect), at the request for the fish-sauce recipe, she feels as if she must begin sobbing—begin and never stop.

"I hope you will not take it unkind of us," pursues Mrs. Moberley, presently, placidly flowing away from her subject and into a new one, "if we leave you all alone the first night of your coming home: but, to tell the truth, we have been engaged for a week past to go on a little jaunt to-night!—well, I suppose it is a dance really, though they do not call it so—a sort of little friendly frisk got up among the young people—no doubt" (with a jolly laugh) "we shall have plenty of fun and quizzing!"

"It is at a place five miles the other side of Helmsley!" explains Diana; and in her eyes also there is a flash of young joy and expectant mirth; "everybody about here has joined to hire the big [illegible] from the King's Head; it is to come here first: then we go round the town collecting everybody, we end with the Barracks; six of them have promised to come; do you think" (a little doubtfully) "that it *can* hold us all?"

"The Simpsons have offered mother a seat in their fly!" cries Bell, in glorious antistrophe; "otherwise she would have been obliged to walk" (laughing); "we set our faces against having one chaperone with us—nothing but officers and young ladies! I am sure I cannot think how we shall all fit in!"

Joan gives a great sigh of relief. The text-like proverb which nine out of every ten people imagine to inhabit the Bible, "God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb," recurs vividly to her mind. If in a whole long evening of solitude, common-sense, reflection, and strict self-schooling, she cannot get the better of the past, and offer a brave front to the future, she must be a poor creature indeed.

. . . . . .

They are gone now. Mrs. Moberley has joggled heavily away in the Simpsons' fly, and the girls have bumped and rattled smartly off in the as yet empty omnibus. Joan has done her duty by them all to the last: she has fastened on Mrs. Moberley's cap so straight and firm that no ordinary slumber can unseat it; she has dressed Diana's crisp hair, and discouraged the reappearance in it of the bird-of-paradise; she has wisely left Arabella wholly alone, and allowed her to effloresce, unremonstrated with, into copious blue beads, pink flowers, and red fruit. She has kissed them all—Diana twice—and hoped they would enjoy themselves, and sweetly thanked them for their kind wish that she were about to accompany them.

They are gone; Mrs. Moberley's last indistinct mandate screamed out of the fly-window dies, drowned among the rolling of the wheels and the barking of the dogs. All of it that survives to reach Joan's ears is the word "pigs!"

## CHAPTER XXV.

"Can he prize the tainted posies
Which on every breast are worn,
That may pluck the virgin roses
From their never-touched thorne?
I can goe rest
On her sweet brest;
That is the pride of Cynthia's train.
Then stay thy tongue,
Thy mermaid-song
Is all bestowed on me in vain."

JOAN is left alone with her trouble—a trouble that, by its nature, rebuts sympathy; and which would be centupled were any one—even the dogs—to conjecture its existence. After all, it is not always our legitimate sorrows—the sorrows for which our friends condole with us on black-edged paper, and to assuage which they ply us with sal-volatile and texts—that sting us the most sharply. Joan takes her sorrow out-of-doors, and sits down with it on the base of the sundial. She sits down, nor is it by any means clear when she will be able to get up again; as three of the dogs, who prefer her soft gown to either the chill stone or the damp grass, and who know too well what good manners and sociability are to go back to the drawing-room without her, have pinned her to earth by disposing their warm, plump bodies upon her. Her meditations are set to the music of their snores. The soft-shod night comes stepping on with her soundless feet: the lush long grass, the weedy gravel-path, the leggy scarlet geraniums, and lean, slatternly rose-bushes, are growing indistinct.

The Campidoglio children are enjoying one farewell riot among their cabbages and clothes-lines before going to bed.

"Let me look it in the face!" she says, half under her breath; "I am crying for the moon, and I am sickly and dolorous and unstrung, because it does not fall into my lap—because it prefers to go on shining up above me"—a moment later—"up above me! no! the metaphor does not hold there; in my feeling for him there is nothing of looking up; perhaps of us two, I am the more to be looked up to; though indeed in neither is there much to reverence!" A longer pause. The angry Campidoglio mother has swept away her offspring; there is no sound but a slight snore now and then from Mr. Brown, as his nose lies comfortably in the palm of Joan's hand. Even at Portland Villa there are privacy and peace. Forgetting Mr. Brown, she has now flung her arms round the sundial. Her face is pressed close against the hard, cold stone. There is no one to hear the drip of her hot tears.

"Oh my dear!" she says in a low and sobbing whisper; "I do love you! it is no use now to think whether it would have been better to leave it alone; it is too late! the thing is done; though I pray God to give me strength to hide it from you as long as I live. . . . I have loved you without your bidding me; it is not very wise of me, is it? but after all there is nothing to be so much ashamed of! my love will do you no harm if it is good of its kind; I think it is good!—I think it is good!—it may even profit you a little! in all this world, hearty, wholesome, clean love never did anything but good either to the giver or the taker; after all, it is but a poor huckstering kind of love that insists on getting as much as it gives; it is not love, if it stickles for an equivalent, it is barter!"

After a pause, her head still leaned against the stone; her arms still embracing the cold pillar: "I will go on loving you, dear—*will!*" (with a sad, low laugh) "as if there were any choice in the matter—as if I could help it—but I will not let you spoil my life: you shall not make a peevish sluggard of me: I will sleep, I will eat, I will laugh, I will help other people. I will be the better, not the worse, for having loved you!"

She lifts her wet eyes to the sky—(at any high or worthy thought one natu-

rally looks upward, even if it be only to a whitewashed ceiling)—to the sky, where now all the silver squadrons of the old, old stars are drawn up in their nightly array; but alas! between her and their heavenly, mild shining, thrusts itself the eager, human beauty of her love's face; in her ears she still hears his voice, naming to her, as it did two nights ago, one after one, the constellations' lovely names. She looks quickly down again, and her gaze, moistened and moved, falls on the dusk forms of the Sardanapalus pigs moving dimly about in the adjoining field, and occasionally grunting shortly and comfortably to each other, as they snout and rout to and fro, hither and thither. She may look at the pigs as long as she pleases. There is no link that binds them and Wolferstan together in her mind.

The heavy dews of late summer fall round her; they moisten the soft silk of her hair, and the fabric of her gown; Mr. Brown is shivering in his sleep. A bat — voiceless, elfin creature — circles fearlessly round her, crediting her with no more life than the stone against which she leans, when suddenly, in a moment, he is disabused, for she has sprung to her feet, scattering like dead leaves the three solid dogs who had been making a mattress of her. After all, her ears are sharper than theirs.

It is not yet ten o'clock, so the dawn cannot yet be coming, nor have the stars multiplied their shafts of light, and yet—to Joan's eyes—how light it has suddenly grown! For has not her sun risen?

Wolferstan is beside her; Wolferstan —the departed—the meekly forsworn—the prayed against. Even in this dark place she can see the happy flashing of his young and passionate eyes.

"You are not gone to Scotland?" she cries, all in a minute; and, out of her hurrying words and shaken tones, she has much ado to keep the sudden joy that is sweeping in high tide over her so lately-stranded heart.

"How do you know that?" he asks, with a low laugh of young content; "how do you know that I am not an optical delusion? It is almost too dark to see you; but I hear that you are breathing quickly! Are you frightened? Will you make sure that I am real?"

As he speaks, he stretches out his right hand to her, but she does not take it.

"Why have you come back?" she asks, in the same sudden voice, and with the same short, quick breath.

"I have not come back!" he answers, laughing, "because I never went; I never meant to go; you told me that I was going, and I was too polite to contradict you; I have been in London all day—I could not get away before. No, I have not gone to Scotland—why should I?"

She laughs nervously, and her eyes avoid meeting the dusk, fond shining of his.

"Why do people go to Scotland?—to shoot grouse, to catch salmon, to stalk deer!"

He shrugs his broad shoulders, and stretches out his hands with a gesture of abnegation.

"I renounce them all!"

"And Miss Beauchamp?" says Joan, her eyes still bent on the dim shapes of the shivering, discomfortable dogs, and the almost invisible grass, and speaking with pursed lips, and a little stiff tone; "has she not gone, either?"

"Of course she has gone!" he cries, giving a petulant stamp; "why will you persist in always bracketing us together? I shall repent of having told you that episode of my infancy, if you will persist in so continually and basely throwing it in my teeth."

"Have you come to tell me the sequel of it?" she asks, in a voice which, though a little mollified, contains still a good deal of starch.

"Why do you ask these offensive questions?" he cries, impatiently. "I wish I had a box of cigar-lights that I might

strike a Vesuvian, and see whether your face tallies with your cold, east-windy voice. It is evident that you are displeased with me—and why?—is it because of—last night?—because of—because of the—the—conservatory?"

As he speaks, shying a little, perhaps, at the last words, he takes her hand. He has some little difficulty in finding it, as it is hanging down by her side, and there is small light to help him; but perhaps she covertly aids him, for before long it is lying small, cool, and entirely passive, in his.

"Let us hear the worst!" he says, half laughing, yet earnestly. "No—I will not let it go"—(as she makes a puny effort to withdraw her fingers)—"I have done nothing to deserve having it taken away from me; if I had I would give it back to you in a moment!—but come, let us hear—what do you suppose happened?—what do you think we said or did—when we got there?"

"I have never hazarded a conjecture!" she answers, lifting her small, white chin into the air, and speaking in a tone of equal frostiness and falsity.

"Do you think—do you think," he says, stammering, and, dark as it is, she knows that he is reddening—"do you think" (in a sneaky and uncertain voice) "that I *kissed* her?"

"I think it is extremely probable!" (in a tone that, but for the tremble in it, would be the *ne plus ultra* of virginal dignity and ice). She fears that her fingers are trembling too, and that he can feel them.

"How about the charity that thinketh no evil?" cries the young man, joyously. "Well, then!—you are wrong!—I did nothing of the kind!"

"You did not?" (the frost disappearing in an instantaneous thaw, melted by the sunshine of an ungoverned relief and joy).

"I did not!—to you" (in a slower, and less triumphant key)—"to you, who are my conscience, to whom I have always persistently turned my worst side outward—I will not deny—if it were not dark, I do not think that I should be brave enough to confess this—that it *was* a temptation; I suppose there never yet was a storm that did not leave some sort of a swell behind it, however entirely the storm itself may be past—well" (speaking quicker and more easily), "I am afraid that I can count on my fingers the temptations that I have resisted in the course of my life; but I did resist this one!—as I live I did!"

She has snatched away her hand from him, successfully this time, and, still standing, throws her arms round her old friend the dial. Perhaps she is thankful for its cold support.

"Even if I had," continues the young fellow, eagerly, in some repentance for and some fear at the results of his own candor—"even if I had it would not have hurt—it would not have touched my utter loyalty to you!—you do not comprehend? ah! we are made of a coarser *pâte* than you! the sort of feeling that I have for her, you would not take at a gift—you would toss it away disdainfully were I to offer it to you! There is no doubt" (in a tone of irritated reflection) "that some women have the happy knack of stirring up and bringing to the surface the dregs of one's being; now, with you, I forget that I have any dregs!"

No answer. Regy and Algy have seated themselves very close together on the foot of the sundial, propped against each other in dismal community of endurance and looking ostentatiously miserable.

"When I came back," continues Wolferstan, repenting still more heartily of his honesty, "it was in ten minutes—believe me it was in ten minutes—you were gone! I went out on the terrace, I ran to all our resorts—to our trellised rose-walk—to our beech-tree seat—to our yew-hedge—you were nowhere; I called you softly by your dear little quaint name—did you ever hear such impertinence?—

but there came no answer; and at last, some one told me that you had gone to bed! Why did you go to bed? what business had you to go? who gave you leave?"

Still she is silent. The small night wind blows her heavy gown softly against him, but carries no message to him from her dumb mouth.

"Are you still out of humor with me?" he asks, rather crestfallen; then, after a moment, in a tone of doubtful exultation: "Is it possible, Joan—is it possible that you are—jealous of me? It seems too good news to be true; but indeed—indeed it looks like it. As for me, do you know that I am jealous of the very dews that have leave to drench your gown? of the very dial round which your arms are thrown; why are they—why are they not round me instead? at least, I should not be so cold and unresponsive." He steps nearer to her, with his arms passionately outstretched, but she slips from him as if she were a mist-maiden, made out of moonbeams and evening vapor. "Are you angry?" he cries, vehemently; "indeed you have no need to be! I ask you to put your dear arms round me for always—for all my life, be it short or long! Oh, more than ever now I hope it may be long!"

She does not answer, but it is not wrath that keeps her dumb, nor does he any longer think so, for through the gloom her fair wet eyes have met the dark fond burning of his.

"I had to come to-night," he says, in an eager half whisper; "I could not put it off till to-morrow. I thought, 'I may die in the night.' Even if they had all been here—they are all out, are not they, God bless them!—but even if they had all been sitting round, I think I should have had to ask you all the same."

She laughs a little—a laugh that is half a sob.

"I meant to have asked you last night, only you went to bed," indignantly. "The more I reflect upon [illegible] unjustifiable I think it of you. By going to bed you robbed us of a whole long day—a whole twenty-four hours! How *dared* you?"

He has taken her two arms and laced them about his neck; with his own he is straitly prisoning her supple, sweet body. She is not struggling at all; why should one struggle to escape from absolute well-being? After a moment:

"Have you reflected," she says, sobbingly, "that you will have to sit opposite to me at breakfast for perhaps fifty years?"

"I will do nothing of the kind," he answers, stoutly; "opposite to you with a long table, an urn, and half a dozen other impediments between us! No, no, I have had enough of sitting opposite to you! I will never sit opposite to you again. Oh, my one love! my sweetheart, my tall white lily-bud, how soon are you going to give me a kiss?"

At his speech she slowly raises her silk head, which has been drooping lily-wise on his breast, and, lifting her passionate pure mouth to his, their lips make sweet acquaintance in an interminable first kiss. Does any after-kiss, I wonder, ever equal, in point of mere duration, the enormous longevity of a first one? Only the stars and the dogs see it—the stars, both the great and the small ones; both those that shine in luminous solitude, and those that are gathered in lustrous families. As for the dogs, they look away yawning and humping up their chilly backs. To Joan it is an absolutely new sensation; to Wolferstan—well—not wholly novel. But this goes without saying; a man brings his scanty dregs, and a woman her ripe first-fruits, and all the world (the woman herself included) look upon it as a fair and equitable exchange. In an innocent tumult of great and astonished bliss, Joan gives herself to her love's new caresses. He is the first to break the lovely silence.

"What is it that gives this sharpest edge of keen pain-pleasure?" he cries,

looking passionately up at the impassioned sky. "O love! do you know that I can fancy no ecstasy in the conventional idea of heaven? the dead-sweet certainty of everlasting fruition would nauseate my palate; it is the uncertainty —the thought that you may die—that I may die—that to-morrow—to-morrow it may be ended and gone, that makes this agony of rapture."

As he speaks he gathers yet more strainingly and closely her trembling body to his young and leaping heart, but at his words she shudders, and draws herself away.

"You are wrong! you are wrong!" she cries, vehemently; "in love there is no uncertainty. All those who have ever really loved, whether they died to-day or three thousand years ago, love still. Oh, my dear? what good or pleasure could there be in it if we believed that it could pass? In this weak and shifting world it is the one all-sure, all-strong, all-lovely thing! Kill me, sooner than convince me of its mortality!"

As she so brokenly speaks, she lifts her streaming eyes to the stars that are not clearer or more holy than they. And those words and that look her lover carries away with him in his heart, when, five minutes later, she sweetly but resolutely sends him away. I think that they will be buried with him when he dies.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

The French call a wakeful night a "*nuit blanche*." Surely this is a misnomer. To most people, a night on which they do not sleep is a black, not a white one. But for once, in Joan's case, the epithet is meet and fitting. The night that follows her troth-plight is one of the whitest of her life. And yet she sleeps not at all. Why should she? Sleep is a good and goodly thing, better than any jog-trot happiness, or usual every-day content, but it is not better than a great, keen, and poignant felicity. Why should she, then, exchange the better for the worse? Broad awake she lies; not tossing about, not feverish or troubled; quite still and restful, with her two white hands clasped beneath her head, and her wide blue eyes looking her new treasure full and steadily in the face. She is unconscious even of the flinty pillow and the potato-stuffed mattress. She hears every one of the slowly-told hours as they are spoken out to the night by the hospital-clock. She hears her aunt and cousins return; hears them trail wearily up-stairs; hears Bell say something loud about "Jackson;" and Diana, mindful of her supposed slumbers, cry "Hush!" Mrs. Moberley, indeed, goes so far as creakily to open her (Joan's) bedroom-door, and look in, shading the candle-flame with four fat fingers; but, in a moment, Joan has shut her eyes, and feigned the sleep that is so far from her brain.

"Fast as a church! sound as a top!" says her aunt, in a large whisper; and so closes the noisy door again and retires.

By-and-by, the morning draws on. She is in no hurry for it. She is content to lie and watch it slowly supplanting its ebon-haired sister; to see the dawn-wind sucking in, and then blowing outward again, the scant curtain at the open window; to see the eastern gates painting themselves with pearl against the coming of the great flame-horses that will

> "Shake the darkness from their loosened manes,
> And beat the twilight into flakes of fire."

They have come now: they are stretching in mighty gallop through the sky: the sun has risen, and Joan must rise too; for have not she and her love given each other early tryst by the washing of the morning waves? She dresses and warily goes down the dark stairs; warily, for, in all human probability, a coal-box or pail of water at the stair-foot awaits all those whose steps are not

guided by a crafty and distrustful caution. The house is dark and shut up and close. She gropes her way to the dining-room shutters and opens them. After all, it would have been kinder perhaps to have left them shut. An overset chair, empty soda-water bottles, crumbs, sandwich-wrecks, mark where the family have sparsely reveled overnight. It is the same scene of squalor as that to which she had descended on the first morning of her arrival; but with how different an eye does she now regard it! In her glance there is no heart-sickness, no inward shrinking from the prospect of a limitless future of dirt. From all these evils she is about to be delivered; and this deliverance—great and joy-bringing as it would be were it taken singly—is only one small incident in her large felicity.

Through the reaped harvest-fields her swift feet carry her, hardly feeling the weight of her light body; the fields where now, of all the sappy green blades that greeted her eyes on that first April morning of her coming, nothing now remains but pale, harsh stubble. The dogs pursue each other in foolish scampering circles over the plain where, so lately, the crowded ears waved and rustled as high as a man's head. As she nears the sea, she quickens her pace; for, early as she is—and no mock modesty, or thought of enhancing her own value by delay, has made her late—yet he is before her. There he stands among the sandy dunes, looking toward the east and her. As she comes stepping toward him, over the faint sea-hollies, and the bitter wan sea-grass, she seems to him a transfigured Joan. Surely her cheeks have borrowed some of the fine dawn-red that lined the sun's cradle; surely her eyes have stolen some of the heavenly shining. So, in the eye of the morning they meet, and give each other a sweet good-morrow.

"Are you sure," says Joan by-and-by, gently yet deftly eluding her lover's blandishments, and soberly his hand instead—"are you sure that you are in the same mind still? are you sure that it was not—was not—accidental last night? that there is no—no—mistake?"

He laughs—a low laugh, less of mirth than of utter heart-content. "There is a mistake!" he says, cheerfully, "or at least there was one—I have been repenting of it ever since last night. Do you know what it is?—That I did not ask you to marry me the first time—the first moment—I ever saw you. What a great deal of time we have wasted in preliminaries!" (regretfully); "but," in a lighter tone), "never mind, there is plenty still before us; in all human likelihood there are yet many good years ahead of us. More, far more, than we have yet passed."

She shakes her head a little sadly. "In life and in death there is no likely or unlikely: the likely go; the unlikely stay."

They have sat down on almost the same spot where, five months or more ago, he had found her sitting alone, with clasped knees and far-traveling eyes. Over the sea there is spread a wide and luminous mist—gold-shot, like a king's vesture; and above it, trampling it with his fire-feet, chariots the great sun, making all earth and heaven one laugh.

"But seriously," says Joan, putting her arms round Mr. Brown, and arranging him quietly between herself and her lover, as a slight barrier against the latter's insatiate endearments, "but seriously, *indeed* I am not asking for the sake of being contradicted. I never was more deeply in earnest in my life. Have you well and ripely considered the many and great drawbacks that there undoubtedly are to me?"

"What drawbacks?" he says, abruptly, coloring and throwing out at her a side-glance of embarrassment and fear.

She laughs softly. "You need not look so tragic; I know of no new ones, only the old ones—with which you are quite as well acquainted as I am!"

"Is that all?" he says, while his

chest rises and then sinks again, in a great sigh of relief. "Well, let us hear them! Which be they?"

"Have you reflected," says Joan, slowly, and flushing a little, while with her bare palm she scoops up a few grains of loose sea-sand, "that you will be Mrs. Moberley's nephew?"

He nods. "Yes—Mrs. Moberley's nephew. Has she any more? or am I the only one?"

"That you will be Bell's first-cousin?" still more slowly, and bending face and eyes as if to count the sand-grains in her hand. "Not *second*, mind—one may slur over second-cousins—but *first?*"

Again he nods. "Yes—Bell's first-cousin—go on!"

"That they will call you Anthony? At least I do not know about Diana, but I think that my aunt, and I am sure that Bell, will."

If, at this suggestion, Wolferstan's spirit undergoes any inward convulsion it is known only to himself and his conscience. Narrowly as Joan is now watching him, she can detect no sign of wincing. "I shall be hurt if they do not!" he answers, doughtily. "If it would give them any satisfaction to abbreviate me to 'Tony,' I am sure that they are more than welcome."

"That you will have to be 'hail fellow well met' with Micky—why do I call him Micky?" (impatiently correcting herself); "it is a bad habit I have fallen into—with Mr. Brand and Mr. Jackson—"

"And Mr. Brown!" interrupts Wolferstan, joyously, pulling that gentleman's left ear.—"Do you hear, Mr. Brown? you and I are to be 'hail fellow well met'—so give us a paw."

Mr. Brown complies, and, not being a dog to do things by halves, he rapidly gives first one paw then the other, and finally jumps wholly up on Wolferstan's knee, where he sits with difficulty poising himself, but trying to look comfortable and smirking on that uneasy eminence.

She shakes her head with a little hopeless gesture.

"I see that you will not be grave!"

"Why should I be?" cries Wolferstan, bubbling over again with unavoidable young laughter. "No one could make so bad a joke to-day, that I should not laugh at it, but indeed I am grave sometimes. Last night—by-the-by, did you sleep last night? I think I shall be rather hurt if you tell me that you did—I did not close my eyes. I heard all the clocks—I really believe we have twenty that strike, besides several loud tickers that do not strike—well, I heard them beat out every quarter of an hour of the tardy night. I could not sleep for plans that jostled each other in my head—ten lives will not be long enough for all the work that I mean to crowd into mine—into *ours* I mean!" with a happy, quick changing of the lonely for the companionable pronoun.

She does not interrupt or answer him with words, but the eager shining of her eyes tells with how keen a sympathy she follows him.

"Do you know," he says, quite gravely now, though to-day his gravity is almost as joyous as his laughter—"do you know that I have slouched and dawdled through twenty-seven years of my life? is not that enough in all conscience?—for myself I have never had any ambition; always I have needed some one either to goad or to coax me into real work; hitherto there has been no one—no one to do either!—they say, nowadays, that there is no such person as the devil, do not they?—well, all I know is, that I have a special own devil of sloth and sluggardliness!—beloved, you will help me to fight him, will not you?"

"That I will, God willing!" she says, low but steadfastly, while her fingers straitly yet modestly press the nervous hand that, clasping hers, rests on Mr. Brown's warm back; he having jumped down from Wolferstan's knee, and resumed his position between the lovers as

soon as he thought he could do so without hurting the young man's feelings.

"Among all the women I have ever loved," says Wolferstan, lifting his confident, bold eyes to the kind, suave sky above him—"and" (laughing), "indeed their name is Legion—there has never been one that inspired me with a wish to *rise!*—always I have felt quite comfortable and high enough, while you, beloved—already—already you begin to beckon me up to your own level!"

"To my own level?" she cries, in eager, quick disclaimer, while her eyes go to meet his through a lovely mist; "nay, love, higher—higher!"

For a few moments both are silent. The tide is ebbing fast. The wave that frothed at their feet ten minutes ago, now sucks the glorious wet sand a hundred yards off, and lends ever-new lengths of shining sea-ribbon to the beach, to be fetched back again when the next tide flows. Up and down, up and down on the small bright billows, the fearless seamews ride.

"We will live to a great age!" says Wolferstan, presently, quite seriously; "I believe that nine out of every ten people die because they have not a resolute enough grip upon life—because they are not determined to live!—there is no reason, is there, why, this day fifty years, we should not again be sitting here still hand-in-hand—still looking out young-hearted on the everlasting laughter of the morning sea?"

. . . . . .

Early as it is when they met, it is nearly one o'clock before they part; before, with a hundred leave-takings and as many moans, Wolferstan grudgingly lets go, for half a dozen hours, the woman whom he has done without for seven-and-twenty contented years. On very slight encouragement he would come to luncheon; but he does not receive that slight encouragement. On the contrary, he is strongly discouraged when he not obscurely hints his willingness to share the Moberley fare. Perhaps what gives firmness and constancy to Joan's denial is the fact that she is aware of what the luncheon is to consist; viz., of a resurrection-pie, in which all the atrocities of the past week hold dreadful rendezvous in one abominable pasty.

On entering the drawing-room she finds the Moberley triad all gathered in the window; all standing, and all with heads close together, bent over some object of interest held in the hands of one of them. At her entry they all turn with exclamations of relief and pleasure toward her.

"What a provoking girl you are!" cries Bell, sharply; "you always manage to be out of the way when anything interesting happens! Here is another note come for you from the Abbey! What can it mean? Surely" (in accents of almost indignation), "they cannot be wanting you back there already!—it cannot be another invitation!"

"An invitation! tut!" cries Mrs. Moberley; "more likely it is to tell her that she has left a pocket-handkerchief or a pair of stockings behind her!—girls are always so heedless about their linen!"

"That groom will know his way here soon!" says Bell, with a proud smile; "the traffic between the two houses is certainly becoming brisk!"

During the foregoing observations Joan has torn open the well-fingered and stretched envelope presented to her, and hastily mastered its contents.

"It is not an invitation!" she says, answering the six intent eyes that are focusing her; and, if they had leisure to notice her complexion, they might mark how utterly that small piece of note-paper has abolished from her cheeks the dainty red that love, sea-air, and exercise, had printed there; "on the contrary, it is to say that Mrs. Wolferstan is coming here to-day—she will be here about three!"

"Mrs. Wolferstan?"

"Coming here?"

"To-day?" cry the three voices, in

each of which awe, astonishment, and rapture, are mixed in differing proportions.

In Mrs. Moberley's, the awe predominates; in Diana's, the astonishment; in Arabella's, the rapture.

"Who was right now?" she cries, triumphantly; "did not I tell you that we had made a favorable impression the other night? though you would have it that they were laughing at us.—I always knew that it was only the ice that wanted breaking; who knows most of the world now, pray?"

"What a pity that the bell is broke!" says Mrs. Moberley, with meditative regret; "however, Sarah must be on the lookout, and run before he has time to ring."

"I wish that she had chosen any other day to have a face-ache!" says Diana, fretfully; "she looks so dreadful with her head tied up!"

"I am afraid," says Joan, slowly, looking deprecatingly from one to the other of her three auditors, "that this is not exactly an ordinary visit; very likely—no doubt, indeed, she will call upon you some other day—by-and-by; but I think—I am afraid—that to-day she wishes to see me in private on some—matter of business!"

"Do you mean," cries Bell, loudly (anger deepening still more the already deep tone of her face), "that she expects us to turn out of our own drawing-room for *her*?—if she had wished to have any private conversation with you, why could not she send for you up to the Abbey? And, after all, what *can* she have to say to you that she does not wish your own *nearest relations* to hear?"

"I am sure that I do not want to hear her secrets!" says Mrs. Moberley, placidly, though with a slight accent of disappointment; "I always hate mysteries!—from a girl, I always was a terrible blab; I never could keep anything to myself; now, your poor aunt—*your* poor mother, I mean, Joan, was quite different—she was as close as the grave; I defy anybody to get anything out of *her* that she did not want them to know!"

Ten minutes later, Joan, escaped from her family's conjectures and lamentations, is sitting in her own little bare room. On her knee is outspread her future mother-in-law's missive, which, for the tenth time, she is rereading; although at the first she had mastered not only the gist, but every little word of it. And, indeed, there is not much to master.

"Dear Miss Dering:

"If I hear nothing to the contrary, I shall be with you this afternoon at three o'clock, as I wish to speak to you on a subject of the most vital importance.

"Yours, truly,

"Sophia Wolferstan."

What that subject of most vital importance is, Joan has no difficulty in conjecturing. And since, in less than two hours, a battle is to be fought, she is already arming herself with spear, shield, and buckler, for it. In order to harden herself against, and take the sting out of, the many depreciating remarks that she is aware will, during the next three hours, be addressed to her, she is saying them all over, in order, to herself.

"I am poor!" she says, her eyes pensively fixed on the bald old drugget, whose original tints conjecture alone can now restore—"very poor!—I have no money—at least, I have a thousand pounds, which, in their eyes, is the same as having none; I have extremely undesirable connections—relations rather: I have sunk to a grade of society far below their or my own natural level. To all these accusations I must say, unfeignedly, 'Amen!'"

She sighs heavily, and her eyes raise themselves from the drugget to the washhand stand, and fasten upon the mutilated ewer, which is now, so to speak, reduced to being only a torso; its handle having lately gone to join his long-lost brother, the spout, on the ash-heap. She smiles sardonically. "Certainly, it is a singular

house in which to come to look for a wife!" By-and-by, in self defense, she begins diffidently to reckon up her counterbalancing advantages. "I am well-born and well-bred," she says, half aloud; "I have an old and stainless name—older, more stainless, than their own: there are absolutely no dark stories about any of us; we have always held our heads up, and looked the world straight in the face. As for me, I thank God that there is no man on this earth that can say the least light word of me; I thank God, too, that I am healthy and strong; I bring no taint of disease or shame into any family I enter!"

As she so speaks, her dejected head lifts itself, her bent figure grows straight; there come a greater dignity and confidence into her whole bearing.

"Let her say her worst!" she says, with low energy; "she shall not part us two!"

Strong in this resolution, she goes down to luncheon; and every mouthful of resurrection-pie confirms her in the resolve not lightly to forego a lover in whose power it is to deliver her forever from so noisome a *plat*.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

The hospital-clock has reached only the second stroke of three, when the Wolferstan carriage draws up at the door of Portland Villa. Such unexampled punctuality utterly routs and consternates this simple household. Sarah, who, to do her justice, had meant to lay aside her face-cloth, and appear in the modified dirt of her Sunday-cap, has no leisure to put her good intentions into practice; nor is she indeed in time to hinder the footman from tugging several times with wasted vigor at the broken bell-pull.

There is a sound of scuffling and hustling, as the Moberley family transplants itself hastily and repiningly from the drawing-room to the dining-room. Only Joan is ready. She has dusted the ornaments — so called — and the paralytic chairs (but this, indeed, she does every day), and has set about what flowers she could find in the ragged garden, to do honor to Anthony's mother. But when all her ameliorations are completed the apartment still appears to her to exhibit the *ne plus ultra* of lacquered dirt and gilt squalor.

The last Moberley skirt is scarcely out of sight when Sarah announces in a garbled and Malaprop manner, "Mrs. Wolferstan," and the next instant Joan and her mother-in-law-to-be stand face to face.

"Punctual to the moment, you see!" says the latter, beginning to talk at once and quickly; "did not I tell you that punctuality was my one virtue? Never in all my life have I missed an appointment, or been late for a train; it is well to have even a small virtue in perfection; is not it?"

"Is it a small virtue?" says Joan, politely. Through the affected gayety of her guest's manner she detects with surprise the nervousness of her voice, and of as much of her face as the white-gauze veil, tightly swathed across it, leaves visible. ("She must be going to say something extremely disagreeable," is the girl's reflection; "it frightens even herself; well, it cannot be worse than what I have already said to myself!") "I am so sorry that there is no blind," she says, civilly, glacing toward the shadeless casement; "and I am afraid that the curtains do not draw very well either. If I had known that you were coming, I would have tried to rig up something."

But Mrs. Wolferstan does not heed her remark.

"It is always a mistake beating about the bush, is not it?" she says, laughing nervously, and blinking in the potent sunlight which is rolling the afternoon might of his fire-streams in upon the

counterfeit gold of her hair, and the real lace on her dress; "always better to go to the point at once — straight to the point; — I always go straight to the point; do not you?—and I have always credited you with such sound sense—give me good serviceable work-a-day sense, that is what I always say; and while you were with us you and I found out so many points of sympathy and agreement did not we? that I have no doubt—none at all—that—that—when I explain myself, we shall be found to agree perfectly here, too."

"Perhaps, when I know what it is that we are to agree upon, I shall be better able to judge," answers Joan, with a grave smile.

She has sat down on a chair near, but not too near, to her companion; for Mrs. Wolferstan is not fond of being closely looked into, and it is always the truest kindness to her to seat one's self at about a bow-shot's distance from her.

"No doubt it is only a piece of silly servants'-hall tittle-tattle," continues the other, her uneasiness plainly waxing as she nears the pith of her subject; "we all know how things grow in the carrying—the proverbial three crows—ha! ha!—but I said, I will go to the fountain-head—it is always safest to go to the fountain-head; do not you agree with me?"

"Perfectly."

"I am quite inclined to laugh at myself already!" (still with the same factitious falsetto mirth) "you will laugh at me too—I give you leave—we will have a good laugh together; but the truth is—I am always an advocate for truth—truth, truth, at any price, I always say; well, the truth is, I came to speak to you about—about—*Anthony!*"

"You are too late!" says Joan, rising and stretching out her hands before her, as one that warns off another, and speaking in a resolute, clear voice—"you have come too late—a day too late! Yesterday—last evening, Anthony asked me to marry him!"

"And you said 'yes?'" cries the other, rising too, forgetting for the moment her mincing airs and girl-gait, and speaking in a voice so shrill, genuine, and resonant, that, did not the evidence of Joan's senses tell her that it proceeded from Mrs. Wolferstan's mouth, she would have disbelieved in the possibility of its being hers. "*And you said 'yes?'*"

"I said 'yes.' Is there any reason why I should not say 'yes'?"

They stand facing each other; Joan tall and pale, and resolute; her two hands straitly clasped together, and her courage gathered up; for is not this the brunt of the battle?

"What!" cries the elder woman, her voice rising to the neighborhood of a scream, and for an instant forgetting even her complexion as she pushes up her veil, as if to get air at any price, even at the price of exposing her face — painted, gummed, and stuck together as it is—to the gaze of the pitiless western sun, and of Joan's steady eyes—"what!—you can stand there and look me, his mother, in the face and ask, 'is there any reason why I should not marry your son!'—you too, whom I credited with such sound sense!"—(whimpering off into fatuity again).

"Are you going to tell me that a marriage with me must be a disadvantageous one for any man, much more for one who, like your son, might ask and get so much?" says Joan, speaking in a low voice, but quite calmly and gently. "I know it! I quite agree with you!—Are you going to tell me that I am poor—almost destitute—that I have very undesirable relations—that I have sunk to a grade in society far below your or my own natural level? It is all quite true! I quite agree with you; but—" (her voice rising a little, and a happy moisture tempering the fire of her brave blue eyes)—"but he knows it all too, and he has overlooked it!"

"I protest that I am quite unable to follow you!" says Mrs. Wolferstan, coldly. She has sat down again as if exhaust-

ed—sat down with a sudden confidence, which shows her to be no *habitué* of the Moberley chairs; has pulled down her veil again, and resumed her chilly every-day voice; "I never was so mistaken in any one in my life—I, who generally am supposed to have a good deal of insight into character!—you affect to be alluding to the drawbacks that there are to a union with you, and you pass over in total silence the one insuperable objection; in comparison with which all the others are trifles light as air—as air!" (fretfully waving about a large black fan).

"What do you mean?" asks Joan, slowly, her blue eyes widening in a painful wonder; "as God lives, I have told you all the drawbacks to myself that I know of; certainly they are many and great enough; I blame no mother for giving me a cold welcome, but you hint at something else—something worse!—what else can there be? known to you, unknown to me?"

"How!" cries the other, in accents of unfeigned amazement and dismay; "are you serious? but indeed there is no appearance of insincerity about you; is it possible that you do not know the—really it is difficult to know how to word it—the deplorable—the lamentable circumstances?"

"I know nothing!" answers Joan, her composure breaking a little, and speaking in quick and shaken tones; "I am in the dark! I see—" (lifting up her hands, as if to ward off a blow about to fall)—"I see that something dreadful is coming; if you have any mercy—if you have any humanity—let it come quickly!"

"Is it possible?" says the other, in a scared voice; "who could have imagined such a thing? is it possible that you are ignorant—that you have not heard—that no one has ever told you about—about—*your father?*"

"My father! I know absolutely nothing of him! I have vaguely heard that he was rather wild, and that he died when I was ten months old; is there anything to hear? anything bad?" (her voice sinking to a suffocated whisper).

All the blood has, in a moment, drained itself away from her sweet cheeks; even from the lips, but now so ripely, dewily red; all the color that is left in her centres in her eyes, that—wide, and blue, and dimly frightened—stare out from her small white face.

"This is too shocking!" cries Mrs. Wolferstan, rising hastily, and making for the door; "you must excuse me, I will leave you! I must go home! I will write; you may depend upon me; as soon as I reach home I will write!"

"You will not write!" says Joan, rapidly crossing the room; standing with her back against the door, and speaking in low, stern tones, steadied by an enormous effort—"you will tell me—tell me now—before you leave this room!"

"It is absolutely impossible!" says Mrs. Wolferstan, whimpering, and feeling with futile fingers for the useless door-handle. "I never was able to break anything to anybody in my life! I never had the nerve for it; I refer you to your aunt; she knows the whole affair: she will tell you."

"*You* will tell me!" repeats Joan, still in the same resolute, low voice, as she stands—inexorable guardian—with her straight young back against the door-panel. No long-buried god or marble nymph was ever so pale as she; nor did ever blue eyes look out in frozen terror from a more ashy face. "You will tell me; you have begun, and you must end; if I can bear to hear, you can bear to speak!"

"I never was placed in such a position in my life!" says the elder woman, trembling all over, and aimlessly fumbling for her smelling-bottle; "I, too, who have always—all my life been physically incapable of giving pain to any one! I, who never could bear to see a fly killed—but—since you insist upon it—since you use compulsion—since you give me no choice—I suppose I must be driven—though

certainly no one in the world is less fitted for the task than I—to tell you that—that—your father—"

She stops.

"Go on!"

"That your father—really it is barbarous to have to say such things of a parent to a child—that your father, after having been the scapegrace and *bête noire* of his family all his life—after having nearly broken his father's heart, and run through all his mother's fortune, into which he came at his majority—after having put himself entirely out of his own station in society by contracting a *mésalliance* with a barrack-master's daughter—you must excuse my saying so, but it was what his family called it—put a climax to his—his—misfortunes by—"

Again she stops, dead short, gasping.

"Go on!"

"By—by—well, it is not my fault—you will have it—by forging his employer's signature—he had been taken into the employ of a provincial banker as clerk—to a check for a large amount. Out of regard to the family, and especially out of regard to your grandfather, whom all the world reverenced, the banker abstained from prosecuting, and, I am told, honestly tried to hush up the matter. But you know" (with a shrug) "how impossible it is to keep things of this kind quiet. In a day the affair had got wind, in a week the whole country-side, high and low, gentle and simple, knew it. Soon afterward, fortunately—one may really say, providentially—your father died. There, I hope you are satisfied now!" sinking down on a chair, and breaking, behind her swaddling veil, into a torrent of feeble tears.

There is a silence, a dead, icy silence' at least in the room; for outside God's good air is full of merry noises—the holiday shrieks of the scampering Campidoglio children, the triumphant clucking of the Sardanapalus hens. After a while:

"What," says Joan, in a rough, slow whisper; reeling as one drunk, while her haggard eyes roll round the miserable finery of the little garish room—"what—is—this—you—have been saying? There—is—something—wrong—about my ears! I—hear wrong." Another pause. "What," her voice rising with sudden leap into an anguished loudness, as, staggering forward, she convulsively clutches the wrists of the cowering old woman, while her wild eyes turn the full agony of their blaze on her face—"what! do you know who it is that you are speaking to? Do you know that it is I—Joan Dering—whom you have been telling that her father was a *forger*? that it was only by accident that he did not die in a felon's jail? You have lost your wits, I say! you have lost your wits!" spasmodically shaking the frightened hands that she holds.

"I have done nothing of the kind," says Mrs. Wolferstan, thoroughly alarmed and sobbing angrily; "let me go! you have no right to be so violent! I have not said one word for the truth of which I cannot vouch. I am hardly likely to be inventive on such a subject; ask your aunt—ask anybody."

The sound of her peevish, tremulous voice seems to bring Joan back to sanity.

Slowly she looses her hands, and totters blindly back against the wall."

"It is true, then!" she says, under her breath, "True—true—true!" repeating the word over several times, as if it were one of unfamiliar sound and strange meaning.

There is another lead-footed silence. Mrs. Wolferstan is ruefully regarding her wrists, on which Joan's agonized grasp has left distinct red marks. Joan herself is still leaned against the wall, which alone seems to prevent her falling; her hands clinched together in icy wedlock, her eyes stiffly fixed; her red mouth pinched and pale, her dimples murdered and dead. Then she speaks in a harsh, marred voice, with gaps between the broken words:

"They knew it, then, all along—all

these years the people at Dering knew it!—among whom I held my head so high and lorded it over them because they were not so purely born as I? They knew it, and they did not taunt me with it—did not throw it in my teeth. Great God! they were forbearing!" lifting arms and clasped hands high above her head, and then letting them despairingly drop again.

"I suppose that they thought it kinder to keep you in the dark," says Mrs. Wolferstan, querulously; for the tears she has shed have taken all the gum out of her eyelashes, and sent smeary runlets down her party-colored cheeks; "though, for my part, I think they were extremely ill-judged!"

"Kinder! kinder! kinder!" cries the girl, with a wild laugh, her voice at each word scaling new heights of woe. "Do you call that kind? If they had been kind, they would have taught me, as soon as I could speak, that I was not like other children; that I had no right to play with them, or have hopes or a future like theirs. As soon as I could understand anything they should have told me that God had sent me into the world branded —*branded* to my life's end!"

At the last words she falls forward on her trembling knees before a chair, and her stricken head sinks heavily on the gaudy, faded worsted seat. There she lies, absolutely motionless, without a moan or a cry; only now and then a short dry sob tells that she still lives: that her aching soul is still held in the prison of her sweet, white body. Outside still go on the gay every-day noises; the quick feet and high, loud voices of the glad children; the emulous crowing of two rival cocks, each resolute to have the last word.

"I never was placed in such a position in my life," says Mrs. Wolferstan, beginning to sob again, and helplessly eying her prone companion. "I, too, to whom the sight of suffering has always been unendurable; I remember when I was a child, when my canary died—I think the cat killed it—I cried without stopping for three whole days; they could not pacify me. I said, 'Leave me alone, I will die too.' I recollect it as if it were yesterday."

Her foolish words knock at the door of Joan's brain without gaining any admittance. They convey no more meaning to her mind than does the talk of the loud evening rooks to us. After an interval —a long, long, interval, neither of them ever knows how long—Joan slowly lifts her face—a face unswollen, undiscolored by any tears, for tears that come hurrying at the call of any surface butterfly sorrow hold cruelly aloof from a master-grief — a face across which is forever written the superscription of an unutterable woe. Then she speaks in a collected, even voice, no longer hoarse or distraught.

"When you first came here to-day," she says, addressing Mrs. Wolferstan, and holding her by the solemnity of her great and woful eyes, "you told me that when you had explained yourself I should agree with you. You are right; I do agree with you." No answer. Another heavy silence. "You came," says Joan, slowly, still in the same composed tone, with not even a gasp or catching of the breath, "to rescue your son from the infamy of marrying a forger's daughter. Well, you have succeeded—he is safe. And now, will you go, please? I think I should be glad if you would go."

Mastered by the silent tragedy of her eyes, the other turns without a word and moves limp and crestfallen to the door, but before she can turn the door-handle Joan is again beside her.

"I was wrong," she says, "discourteous; I ask your pardon. If I had been in your place I should have done as you have done; probably I should have done it more harshly, for, in the face of such a peril, one could not be scrupulous, or pick one's words. I bear you no malice. Good-by"

As she speaks she puts out an ice-cold hand, and the other, taking it, silently goes.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

The day that has been so fair and brave, is waning. The gray-wimpled night steps on. The rival cocks have each led his separate file of wives, daughters, and cousins, to the privacy of the hen-house perch, where, already slumbering with sunk necks, drooped tails, and pouted busts, they antedate the coming night. The Campidoglio children still shriek and plunge and ravage, with all the terrible vivacity of youth.

The hour draws nigh when Wolferstan and his love are again to meet, for sweet good-night speech by the twilight waves. It was only by this concession that she escaped in the morning from his grudging eyes and detaining arms. For a quarter of an hour he has been trudging impatiently up and down on the soft, loose sand and sour, small grass of the dunes, his quick look turned sometimes seaward, but oftener toward the inland landscape, where, in the utter mellow stillness of even, spread the shaven cornfields, the steamy meadows, the red cottage-roofs, and heavy-weighted apple-orchards.

To his hurrying thought, his love's steps seem tardy. Each moment that she delays is so much coin filched from their treasury. What right has she thus to fritter the golden sands of their love-time? As he so chidingly thinks, there becomes visible to his intent eyes a figure, small and indistinct from distance, outlined against the pallid primrose of the sky. It is she, at last. His first impulse is to go hastily to meet her, but a superstitious feeling restrains him.

"I will not go to her; she shall come to me; we will meet on the same spot where we met this morning; it will be a good omen."

So he stands still and watches her. She seems to him to come but slowly; and her feet, being such light ones, and having so slender a body to upbear, trail but heavily after each other. But she is close to him now; she, who, five minutes ago, was a dim little blur—a blur that might turn out to be a cow, or a sheep, or even one of the Sardanapalus pigs—is now seen to be a wonderful fair woman, of high stature and grave countenance, in a black gown. He had meant to have reproached her; but, as he looks upon her, his reproaches die away in utter joy and pride. Dumbly he holds out his arms to her. Dumbly, too, she comes up to him; and, without any bidding, lays her soft arms about his neck, and, lifting her face to his, says, in a clear, plain voice, "Kiss me."

As she speaks, no red love-wave—no rosy torrent of virgin shame—sweeps across her cheeks; her eyelids do not quiver, nor her eyes droop. Wolferstan is not the man to need that such an invitation should be twice repeated. Profoundly astonished (though not even to himself would he own this), and still more profoundly glad, he snatches her to his hurrying heart. After a while she withdraws herself somewhat from him, and, still holding up a face whose whiteness not even all his many kisses have been able to dye with any vermeil-stain, she says in a calm, slow voice:

"You are surprised at me!—you wonder what has made me suddenly so forward!—ah!" (with a long sigh), "one does not stand much on forms when one is saying 'good-by!'"

"Good-by?" he cries, startled; then, quickly recovering his happy confidence—"ah! you mean 'God be with you!' I hope he will; now that you are beside me, he is more likely to be."

"Nay," she answers, looking at him with a solemn tenderness, "I mean 'good-by'—'farewell'—whatever other word most means leave-taking!"

'Leave-taking!" he echoes, alarmed and puzzled; "why should we speak

of leave-taking?—are you going anywhere?"

"Ay!" she says, with a bitter smile; "I am going away from hope and love and pleasantness! I wish—oh, I wish that I were going away from life too! but that is not likely!—at twenty, that is not likely!"

"Joan!" he says, now thoroughly frightened, while a vague, cold terror girdles his heart and chills the hot river in his young veins—"Joan! what are you saying? I know that there can be nothing amiss really—what could there be?—what could have happened within these few hours?"

"Nothing has happened!" she answers, her pale lips still curving in that most bitter smile; "only that to-day I have been my own sexton, and have been burying my past and my future together in one deep grave. O love!" (in a voice, anguished indeed, but more natural—more like herself than her late so icy composure), "your labor is lost! you need not try to hide it from me any more; I know—to-day I know—what I am! your mother has told me!"

"What!" he cries, his face, a moment ago goodly and content as the fleckless sky above him, or the meek summer sea at his feet, all overcast with sudden clouds, while his eyes dart steely shafts of anger and fear—"what! she has dared!—"

"Hush!" she says, with low authority, laying her cold hand on his wrathful mouth—"hush! She did well! Had I been she, and she I, I should have done the same. I am glad—" (speaking with firm and weighty slowness), "yes, glad that I have learned in time what an injury I was going to do you; I think—" (the solemnity of her tone tempered by a great softness)—"I think that you know that I would not willingly do you a mischief!"

"I am glad of it," he says, quickly. "God grant that we mean the same thing! There is only one real mischief that you could do me!"

"And you knew it all along—all the time!" she cries—a sort of triumph in her voice, "and yet you would have kept silence all your life, and have set me at your side as your honored wife! O love, it was well and worthily done of you, and I thank you—from the bottom of my heart I thank you for it!"

As she speaks, she humbly takes his hand and kisses it, while the tears, so long in coming, shower at last, in plentiful salt rain from her parched eyes.

"For God's sake, stop!" cries Anthony, snatching away his hand; "you humiliate me! Why, pray!" he goes on, red and stammering, "why should I have told you about it? why should we waste time in speaking of so ugly and outworn, and—and—unimportant a subject? Have not we had pleasanter themes, Joan?"

She shakes her head sadly. "Unimportant, is it? Alas! it is important enough to set us two forever asunder!"

"What!" he says, falling back uncertainly a step or two, as if one had heavily and suddenly struck him, while a great dread slides coldly along his limbs, and chokes back the crowding words that are hurrying to his lips.

"Do you think," she says, speaking with the greatest sweetness, yet resolution withal, "that I love you so poorly as to saddle you forever with my disgrace? Do you think that I will let you—willing as you are—God bless you for that willingness!—couple your good, clean name with my stained one?"

"How!" he cries; the laggard words coming quickly enough now, in torrent-flow; words of utter scorn and contempt; "do I understand you right? Is it my rational, sweet, sensible Joan that is speaking? Are you going to set up a phantom, a bogy between us?—because there are no real hinderances—because the path that leads from me to you is smooth and level as path can be—must you yourself build up impediments and throw obstacles?—impediments of straw—obstacles of air!"

She is silent. Her wet eyes have traveled away to the red western wave, which seems to be dyed with the blood of all the roses that have blossomed since the world was.

"It makes my blood boil to hear you talk of your stained name!" he says, feverishly, beginning restlessly to walk up and down on the little hillock; "how can any stain come near my unsullied lily? and that name" (stopping beside her, and speaking with the utmost eagerness)—"and that name!—not much longer will it be yours! Soon, very soon, mine, which you praise for its cleanness, will be yours too; will not it, beloved? will not it?"

"Never!" she says, looking solemnly and proudly up to heaven's vault darkening over their heads. "I shall never bear your or any other man's name; into no man's home will I carry my disgrace."

"You are consistent!" says the young man, bitterly; "in one breath you tell me that you will never willingly do me a mischief; and in the next you threaten me with what you know will put out my sun and darken my day!"

"Not darken it!" she says, gently. "God forbid! perhaps for a little while I may sadden it; but in that I do you no unkindness; we are none of us the worse for being a little sad sometimes. Oh, my love!" (breaking into a most tender, rueful, drowning smile)—"my comely love! you are so good and goodly; your life is so rich in all pleasant things, that you cannot fret long; it would be unnatural that you should, because one pleasant thing—such a poor and paltry one, too—is taken from you!"

"It is not taken from me!" he cries, in a rough, loud voice, upgathering her into his strong embrace; "do not dare to say so! As easily can your small fingers unwind my arms from about you—let them try! so easily can you unwind your life from mine! they are twisted together, warp and woof! Only God—only God, I say, has leave to give and again take back his gifts, none blaming him!"

She is dumb. Silently weeping, she lies in the jail of her one love's vigorous arms; in no hurry, perhaps, to escape from that embrace, so soon to be forever foregone. And he knows that he might as well have spoken to the deaf tides, or the glooming sands. With a sudden revulsion of feeling—in a transport of resentment and sharp pain, he lets her go; looses her so suddenly, that at first she staggers as one about to fall.

"Go!" he says, rudely; while through the dusk of the hastening night his eyes dart their angry, bright ray into hers; "go!—I set you free!—practise your cheap fortitude! complete the renunciation that costs you so little! If you are as pure as snow, you are also as cold. Go!"

"Am I cold?" she says, in a low and broken voice, though she lifts her fair head spiritedly, and her eyes meet his—meek, yet unflinching; "if, to reckon up how many hours the different moments and half-hours of our meetings make up, and to count them alone as the grain of life, and all else but the chaff—if that is to be cold—well, yes—then I am cold, and you do well to call me so."

Her limbs are trembling so much that they feel as if they would give way beneath her; so she sits down on the dry, barren hill, and he throws himself on the ground beside her. There is a long, long silence; while they two sit wordlessly looking out on the sea and listening to its pauseless song. The sea is a singer that never needs to stop and take breath. The sun is dead, and the waves have forgotten him—forgotten him as utterly as if he had never laid his royal head on their breast. They are paying their homage now to the lady moon, who, kirtled with lawny clouds, is beginning to float up the sky. She is only a half-moon: no great round, yellow, harvest orb; and yet beneath her a field of pale lustre spreads over the sea; one broad white sail on the horizon has caught her light and glimmers

with uncertain silver. Joan's head has sunk on her love's shoulder: their hands are closely locked together. He is the first to speak.

"Joan!" he says, in a whisper of passionate persuasion, so low as to be hardly audible above the ocean's quiet, plain song—"Joan! will you stay with me? tell me that you will! tell me that I have prevailed!"

She sighs heavily.

"Love!" she says, in a deprecating voice, timorous yet resolved, "do not thrust me from you as you did just now; but, indeed, I can never be your wife; if I were, I should have no content or comfort of my life for thinking what a wrong and a discredit I had done you! oh, beloved—do not be angry with me—but you know that to not many of us is given a great stability of will or purpose; what we wish to-day, often we unwish to-morrow: or if not to-morrow—to-morrow five years—to-morrow ten years—to-morrow twenty years—and, whether it came soon or came late, always I should have upon me the heavy fear that a day might dawn when you would repent of the sacrifice you had made—when you would wish it again unmade, and when it would be too late to unmake it!"

He does not answer. The pale moon is shining on his pale face, and coldly pointing out its discomfiture.

"I see," she says, looking up to heaven with a solemn steadfastness, "that God destines me for a lonely life; oh, my darling! do not be sorry for me for that; to-night, indeed" (sobbing quietly), "I think that I am as miserable as any woman can be, but even now I can look on ahead and see a life when I shall not be miserable—a life full of work to do and people to love; and if, by-and-by, now and again, I hear of you as good and prosperous—prosperous in soul and in the higher life as well as in earthly well-being, then—then—though I am alone, I shall not be unhappy—certainly I shall not be unhappy!"

He has buried his face on her knees that she may not see the tears that disfigure it. She passes her light hand fondly over the smooth brown hair that the night-dews are already beginning to wet. The moon has risen higher. One can dimly see the long, cold, rippling smiles curve the cheek of the great water, and the snow-crests of the little waves shine whitely in turning over on the dark beach.

"And if," says Joan, weeping, though her eyes shine with a confident, clear light—"and if you are still resolute to love me—if death finds us still remembering each other, then who will dare to say that hereafter we may not belong to each other in some other world, where the sins of the fathers are not visited on the children? Anthony, good-by! bid me God speed as I bid you!—I must go!"

He has lifted his face from her lap: the face that is wont to be so debonair, so curved with young laughter, so lit up by joy. Marred and wan, you would hardly know it to be Anthony's.

"Go?" he says, in an unsteady voice; "already?"

"Already!" she answers, still weeping; "it must be done, so it had best be done quickly; oh, my one love!" (girdling him for the last time with her fair arms, and closely pressing him to her innocent breast), "you have been very good and tender to me, and I would have been good and tender to you too; we would have outdone each other in kindness and love; God keep you, Anthony!—though henceforth our roads lie apart, I pray—oh, pray you too—that perhaps they may meet at the end!"

"They will meet before the end!" he cries, in a passionate loud voice; "say what you will—do what you will—we have not yet done with each other; time, that wastes and crumbles everything, will waste and crumble your resolve—lovely and loving as you are, do you think that you will be able to bear the barren desert doom that you destine for yourself? It is impossible, monstrous, out of nature!

yet—yet" (his voice taking a note of almost triumphant exultation) "yet—yet—you will come to me!—yet—yet again my arms will hold your beloved, sweet body! you will come to me, I tell you! and, be it soon or be it late, I shall be ready—I shall be waiting!"

"Will you?" she says, shaking her head sorrowfully with a sweet wet smile; "I think not—I think that you will grow tired before I shall! nay, love! till God, who makes all things clean, shall wipe away the stain from me, we two shall meet in love and fellowship never again!"

## CHAPTER XXIX.

THE Moberley tea has long been spread. The cold resurrection-pie—the one viand on the earth's face more abominable than hot resurrection-pie—already adorns the board, when Joan very softly opens the hall door, in the hope that, by an exceedingly cautious entry, she may succeed in slipping up-stairs unseen, unheard, unquestioned. But in this vain hope she is deceived; for no sooner does the slight click that the latch gives in being lifted make itself heard, than the drawing-room door, which has apparently been purposely left ajar, opens suddenly, and in the aperture appears the form of Mrs. Moberley, while over her bounteous shoulders is seen a perspective of younger faces, Bell's and Diana's.

"Why, bless me, child, where have you been?" cries the elder lady, in a tone of mixed anger and relieved anxiety; "I was just going to send out Sarah with a lantern to look for you. Do you know what time it is?"

The light in the passage is fortunately but dim. Joan's head is bent, her hat is tilted over her eyes.

"I was sitting by the sea," she says, faintly. "You know I love the sea."

"The sea, indeed!" retorts Mrs. Moberley, in a scolding and somewhat incredulous tone. "I think the sea has a broad back. To tell you the truth, young lady, I think you are far too fond of *stravaguing* about by yourself at odd hours, when you know quite well, too, that you need never go out alone; it is but a poor compliment to your cousins, and I am sure I do not know when either of them has ever refused to give you her company."

"I am sorry," answers Joan, bending her head—damp with the soft night-dews—still lower on her breast, and speaking in a small, submissive voice.

"I must say," chimes in Bell, following one of the most unamiable rules that guide human nature's often unamiable actions, and giving a prod with her bayonet, too, to the fallen—"I must say, Joan, that it was very shabby of you slipping out without giving any of us the least hint of what Mrs. Wolferstan came about, after all. Come, now, we may as well hear now, at all events; or, perhaps"—(with a huffy laugh)—"perhaps it is a secret, and I have no business to ask."

Joan's white face takes a faint tinge of uneasy red at this question; though, perhaps, the one jet of dim, ill-smelling gas does not betray her; while, with infinite difficulty, she searches among her word-stores for an answer that shall be evasive, probable, and conciliating. But it is so long in coming that Arabella has time to speak again.

"It was a pity," she says, sarcastically, "that you did not warn Mrs. Wolferstan how thin these walls are; if you had, I think she would not have raised her voice so high. We heard her several times so loud—did not we, mother? did not we, Di?—we thought that you must be having a regular quarrel."

"Did you?" says Joan, indistinctly, and catching her breath a little, as she leans heavily against the grimy marbled paper of the passage-wall.

"Dear me!" says Mrs. Moberley, recovering her good-humor, which, indeed, she seldom mislays for long, and shaking

her head meditatively—"dear me! what a thing dress is, to be sure! She must be my age if she is a day! She was married to old Wolferstan a good twelvemonth before Moberley offered to me; and yet, to-day to see her back, and the jaunty way she skipped into the carriage, you might have taken her for sixteen."

"If her back looks sixteen," says Diana, trenchantly, "her face looks a hundred. For my part, I had rather strike a balance, and look fifty all over like you, mother!"

"Think of me in a sprigged frock and a flyaway hat like that!" cries Mrs. Moberley, a fat laugh agitating her whole person like a dish of jelly too quickly carried; "I should do to frighten the crows.—Come along, girls; if the tea is not drawn now it never will be, for it has been standing the best part of an hour."

And thus prosaically, with overdrawn tea and resurrection-pie, closes the most tragic day of Joan's hitherto history. There are many tragedies that are acted in dumb show; none but the actors guessing at all that they are being played; and there are many others that are clad in very homely and fustian clothes. There are two facts in human history—two, at first sight, contradictory propositions—that I think surprise me equally, viz., the ease with which we sometimes die; and the difficulty that there sometimes is in killing us. Often a pin-prick lets out our souls. Often again, we are cut in two, as it were, like a worm or a snake, and yet manage to wriggle ourselves together again. As the days go on, Joan wonders at her own vitality.

Between one sunrise and one moonrise, in a space shorter than the life of a gnat or a convolvulus, she has seen her past and her future pass away hand-in-hand to a death which holds out no dimmest hope of a resurrection. And yet she falls down senseless in no sudden syncope. She has no brain-fever. Neither her clear wits nor her even-pulsing health suffers any hurt or eclipse. When the cracked bell rings to dinner, she eats. When bedtime comes, she sleeps. When Mrs. Moberley's caps pass the boundary of moderate dilapidation, she makes her new ones. Sometimes she laughs. It is mostly the dogs who make her laugh. In her human surroundings, she does not find much to stir her rare and tardy merriment; but she has always a smile for Mr. Brown, and mostly one for Regy and Algy. Perhaps the very circumstance which, at the time, seems to put the crown upon her grief and discomfort; viz., the stringent necessity for hiding her sorrow from the curious, prying Moberley eyes—stringent, indeed, for, if it is known to the Moberleys, then it is also known to Micky; if to Micky, then also to the whole barracks; if to all the barracks, then to all Helmsley too—the necessity for concealing her tears, nay, altogether suppressing them for fear of the traces they leave, is, after all, the best thing that could have happened to her. Perhaps the strain that she has to put upon herself—the obligation to eat when she is not hungry, to laugh when she is not mirthful, to talk when her tongue cleaves to the roof of her mouth—saves her from that collapse which sometimes follows an indulged grief.

But she suffers! oh, she suffers! Her indigent room and meagre truckle-bed, her lame furniture and halt crockery, can bear witness that she suffers. Often, kneeling in the dark—(a candle might betray her)—with face hard pressed against the miserable rush-bottomed seat of one of her two chairs, she hears the hospital-clock toll the eerie hours of deepest night, while she, in wide-awake anguish, is wrestling with her trouble; wrestling with the sometimes nigh-conquering longing to take back again the good she has forgone; to fulfill even thus early her love's prophecy, and say to him, "I come to you! you have prevailed!" to feel once again his lips married in close ers; to hear his joy-

ous voice softly calling her by the small, old-fashioned name that he has thought so fair and sweet. But from all her contests she comes out dismally victorious. Daily the post goes out, and carries no message to the sweetheart she has dismissed.

"I must live in other people's happiness!" she cries to herself a hundred times a day; trying earnestly to brace her nerves and lift her heart to the level of that high but cold and difficult destiny. But almost as often as she raises it, it falls back; down-dragged by a most bitter human yearning for some warm, own private bliss; some happiness that shines not only reflected from other faces, as the sun shines in water, or on burnished brass, but that shall be for warmth and glory and comfort, as the sun himself.

"Live in other people's happiness? How is that possible? As long as I have a mouth myself, will the food that is put into other mouths satisfy me? Will it content me that other women's arms infold their lovers, though mine are empty?"

The one certain and tangible outcome of her pain is the resolve that every day strengthens, to have done, as soon as may be, with this life of dependence and inertia. Woman's work indeed — at least bread-winning work—is not over-plenty in this present world; neither is it ordinarily pleasant or remunerative, or with much of hope or progress in it; but it is work. In the energy of work—good work, bad work, what work you will—suffering is drowned. Never waste your pity on the real workers of this life. Harsh, unlovely, as their outward surroundings may apparently be, yet they neither ask for nor need your compassion. Who feels his wounds in the stress and heat of the fight?

Never, since she entered Mrs. Moberley's door, has Joan's determination to earn her own bread faltered or failed; she being ever of too high and free a spirit to sit down contentedly under the yoke of obligation and sloth. What alone has delayed the hitherto execution of her design is, diffidence as to her own competence for that special branch of labor, toward which almost every educated woman, to whom bread lacks, intuitively turns, viz., teaching.

Her education, indeed—the wide, fine culture, whose original intention was to ornament and occupy the leisure of a luxurious and wealthy life—has fitted her, more than most girls are fitted, for the task she has set herself, and her persevering lessons to Diana have given her, at least in some degree, the faculty of teaching and the habit of patience. The tool, then, is ready. All that yet lacks is the material to work upon.

Miss Dering's project meets with but small favor in her family's eyes when she opens her mind to them upon it.

"Please yourself and you'll please me!" says Mrs. Moberley, in an offended tone; using the formula of magnanimous sound but contracted meaning, which she always employs when anything has occurred to ruffle her; "but I will say, Joan, that it is a sad take-down for us all! Not one of us has ever had anything to do with teaching; and, say what you please, it is no better than a kind of upper servant, without any tips or perquisites either. However, 'a willful man will have his way,' and, as soon as you are tired of your freak, you have nothing to do but dash into the train and come straight off here again! You will always find a knife and fork ready for you—always!"

They say that to all hands willing to labor work comes, but its coming is sometimes tardy. Though Joan's short and temperately-worded advertisement has traveled off into every home where the *Times*, *Standard*, etc., make their way, yet, as the weeks go on, the postman's hands are not overladen with answers for her. No one seems very anxious to have Joan Dering to teach his progeny. For one person who slackly

and faintly desires a governess, nine hundred and ninety-nine earnestly and prayerfully clamor for a cook.

Since the insertion of the advertisement she has received but six replies in all: five to be at once dismissed as absolutely undesirable and utterly inadmissible. The sixth is patently undesirable, too; but, being the last, Joan is loath quite to dismiss it. She has even braced her mind to close with its untempting offers, if nothing better turn up.

It is unjust, impossible, that she should keep Anthony forever in banishment from his own home, and anything, any servitude, any petty tyranny, would be preferable to his returning to find her still here. While she is yet in this state of uncertainty and oscillation, one more calamity befalls her. Mr. Brown sickens—sickens of distemper—and languishes for many weeks, hovering between life and death.

Any one who has watched this terrible disease will know of how perilous, cruel, and wearing a nature it is to the sufferer; how disheartening—sometimes heart-rending—to the human on-looker, powerless to assuage those so patiently-borne dumb agonies. Through long days Joan sits beside Mr. Brown's sick-basket, scarcely giving herself time for necessary food, rest, or exercise. Through many vigils she watches by him; giving him his beef-tea, and his physic, with as tender a punctuality as if he were her brother.

In painfully watching his ribs grow daily more prominent, his poor coat more staring, and his dear goggle eyes more pathetic, Joan goes nigh to forgetting for the moment (despise her as you will for it) that such a person as Wolferstan exists. Mr. Brown is certainly very ill, though never so ill as to be unable to shake hands; once or twice, indeed, when he is at his worst, he gives the wrong paw—the left instead of the right—but, except for this trifling inaccuracy, he never forgets his accomplishment. As it is his only one, it is well that he should have a good, firm grip of it.

By-and-by Joan's patient nursing gains its reward, for Mr. Brown lives. He is spared, we will hope, for many future years of usefulness; to bury and again exhume many a bone, to insult many more dynasties of mysteriously exasperating butcher's boys, to have his ears boxed by many another spiteful tomcat. Mr. Brown lives, and Joan is very—very glad!

## CHAPTER XXX.

Time, the strong scythesman, mows the days. After all, this is an outworn simile, and will soon be unintelligible. Scythes are walking quickly away into the limbo of the past and the outgrown; walking away after flails, spinning-wheels, and distaffs.

In a short time we shall be obliged, in our metaphors and allegories, to represent Time and Death, each with a steam mowing-machine. O Watt!—Watt! you and your tea-kettle have made sad havoc in the poetry of our daily life! The brave summer fire has burned itself out to its last embers. The flower time is dead. The heavy-weighted purple fruit-time is dead too. Between the death-days of these sister seasons the space always seems short and soon spanned:

> "The squirrel's granary is full,
> And the harvest done!"

The plums have fulfilled their annual vocation of making jam, and causing colics; the apples lie *perdu* in tarts; the morella cherries have drunk themselves to death in brandy-bottles; the hips and haws are quickly vanishing beneath the beaks of the little hungry finches; and one recollects again that the holly—hard and prickly December beauty—exists. Earth has stripped off all her green ribbons, and her rainbow gauds, and has lain down to take her rest in her russet gown. Of all her choristers, there is

only the bold cock-robin left to sing her to sleep. It is four months and a bit since Wolferstan went—since, weepingly, his love said to him, "God keep you, Anthony!" Four months! It is, then, time that she should be beginning to forget him. Between us and the events of four months ago, a film is mostly drawn—a film, sometimes of a consistency no greater than a gossamer; sometimes as substantial as a stout cambric handkerchief.

"We slightly remember our felicities, and the smartest strokes of affliction leave but short smart upon us. Sense endureth no extremities, and sorrows destroy us or themselves."

Often we are inclined to pule and whimper over the weakness of our memories, but who would accept the other alternative? Who would care to recollect, with the vividness and accuracy with which he can recall the incidents of yesterday, his birth, his Alexandra bottle, his first whipping? Portland Villa, with the rest of the world, has taken the shivering plunge into winter—shivering, truly this year. Scourging winds, lashing rains, marrow-searching fogs, numbing frosts, glaring snows! On all these instruments in turn Winter plays his terrible marches and solemn fugues. He seems resolute to show in how infinite a variety of ways he can make himself feared and hated. But, indeed, who has ever doubted his dread ability?

"A hard winter!" say even they who dwell in solid houses with well-seasoned doors and nicely-fitting windows; how much more, then, the inhabitants of a gimcrack one-brick villa residence! A villa residence, too, by no means in the best repair! with slates lacking from the roof; with dead-leaf-choked gutters and suffocated spouts. On Joan's walls great green patches of damp, like ugly plague-spots, growths of furry mould, make their appearance. In the eerie winter nights the wind-giant takes the rotten casements in his Titan hands, and makes the whole flimsy house stagger and tremble. Under the warped door, through the chinks and gaps of the window-frames, comes the iced blast; and pierces to the bone the poor soul who, such a few months ago, was panting and gasping in this now frozen attic. Oh, if she could but have saved some of her then superfluous warmth for these miserable winter nights!

The Abbey is empty. Since the exodus it made on one August day, the family has not returned. For the first time within the memory of man, it does not come down for Christmas; nor perform its wonted duty of Christmas-treeing and bran-pieing the children of the neighborhood, dancing the adolescents, and dining the adults.

It is Christmas-day—a streaming, pouring, Christmas-day, when earth and heaven fold each other in one gray embrace, and the horizon is bounded by the window-pane. The Moberley family have dauntlessly, with soaked boots and sludged petticoats, slipped and swum along the flooded road—half ice, half dreary thaw—to the garrison church. They have listened to a sermon evidently originally written for a fine Christmas-day, and, by some oversight, not adapted to the present circumstances—a sermon in which the clergyman directed their attention and admiration toward the glorious sunbeams streaming into the church, which, in point of fact, is so dark that the gas has to be lit.

They are at home again now; are also again dry, and have dined. For a wonder the butcher has not forgotten to bring the beef, nor is there lacking one of those puddings so unaccountably associated with Christ's birth. Mrs. Moberley even, with desperate determination to make merry, insists on brewing a small bowl of punch, and proposes several dismal toasts. "The queen!" "The military!" etc. They are drunk in dejected silence.

"It is not in the least like Christ-

mas!" she says, for the twentieth time; "since the year that your papa died"—(glancing at Mr. Moberley's picture which Sarah, in a well-meant but ill-executed effort to be seasonable and festive, has smothered to the nose in funeral yew)—"since the year that your papa died, I never remember such a Christmas!—never!"

In the corner of her usually jovial eye, there is a tear; whether due to her lost mate or her present *ennui* is not known.

"And to think of this time last year!" says Bell, beginning to cry; "just at this hour we were thinking of going to dress for the ball at the barracks; Bobby Butler's bouquet had just come, and we were comparing notes—do you recollect, Di?—as to which was the choicest, his or Micky's!—mine had more camellias—yours more stephanotis!—and now!—"

Her sobs choke her.

"The infirmary ball indefinitely postponed!" says Diana, beginning tragically to check off their misfortunes on her fingers; "the assembly utterly quashed! no talk of anything at the barracks, and the Abbey shut up! I declare I do not see what use there is in going on living!"

Joan's leaden heart echoes this sentiment, though for widely-different reasons. On what portion of her life dare she fix her eyes? She must keep them, if possible, glued to this narrow strip of barren present on which she stands. Against her will, her winged thoughts carry her back to that last-gone Christmas-day, which seems to her now to be clothed in gold and pearl and crimson, like some opulent apocalyptic vision. As if it were some other Joan, she sees herself sitting as hostess in her great carved chair at the end of the long and dainty table; the bounteous red fire roaring and racing up the wide-throated chimney; the softly shining white tapers in old Venetian chandelier and polished brass sconces; the goodly throng of merry guests; the gay stir of talk; the bandied repartee; the thrust and parry of light wit. Let us at least thank whatever gods there be, that we are not allowed to see our own faces in the future's dread looking-glass! But if the "was" is hard to face, how much harder the "might have been"—that radiant child that died at its birth! By this time, she might have been Wolferstan's wife. By this time the fever and effervescence of lover-love might have been lost and swallowed up in the wide, calm sea of wedded bliss.

She turns with a shudder from her own lot—the annihilated past, the numb present, the ink-colored future! But though her own life-garden be laid waste; though its flowers be dead and its sweet buds trampled and gone—yet is this any reason why, by her gloom, she should make yet more dull and stale the narrow lives around her?

"You despair too soon!" she says, with a smile, whose neighborhood to tears they are both too preoccupied and too dull-sighted to perceive; "you do not know from what unlooked-for quarter something may spring up for you! how little you expected the yeomanry dance!"

Mrs. Moberley shakes her head. "I am not a grumbler!" she says, speaking with slow emphasis; "I take the fat with the lean; but this I will say, that, happen what may, no bit of luck—no windfall, or legacy, or anything else, ever comes our way: if there were to be a rain of gold on all the country round to-morrow, it is my belief that it would leave us as dry as Gideon's fleece!"

Against so resolved a melancholy as this, who can strive? Joan desists from the attempt and goes with the stream. This dejection lasts with a few intervals of a more sanguine character throughout Christmas-week; nor is the weather of a nature to disperse it. The old year weeps itself away. It is New-Year's-day now. The new year has come in with no flourish of yellow sunbeams; no loud trumpeting of herald winds; no ermine mantle of snow. It has crept in noiseless and sul-

len, as if it were ashamed of itself. Even if there had been any sunshine to-day, it would by this time have been gone; for the short winter's day has closed in. That hour has come which, in summer, seems almost at the beginning of the day; in winter, at the end.

It is toward five o'clock. The curtains in the Moberley drawing-room are drawn together as closely as insufficient stuff and rings that decline to run will allow. Neither lamp nor candle is lit, and up the chimney climbs a merry, well-fed fire, that sends long shadows up wall and ceiling. It must be a very ugly room, indeed, that can look ugly when lighted by a cheerful fire, and a cheerful fire alone.

We have all our *beaux jours;* and the drawing-room at Portland Villa is looking almost pretty, thanks to being only half seen. On the floor, beside Mr. Brown's basket, Joan is sitting. He has insisted on shaking hands no less than twelve times running, and, thanks to his convalescent state, has been indulged in this unnecessarily often-repeated salutation. Bell is hanging over a chair-back, which she is idly tilting, and is addressing him as "my ownest wuffy-wuffy," a remark which he is treating with the silent contempt that so foolish an apostrophe deserves. The door opens, and a head (for a wonder not Sarah's) is put in. With one leap the dogs bound from sleep into bark. Even Mr. Brown staggers on to his shaky legs, and contributes his feeble mite of anathema.

"Any admission except on business?" asks a noisily merry man's voice. "May I be allowed to announce myself, as Sarah does not seem inclined to do so?"

It is Mr. Brand.

"You are quite a stranger," cries Mrs. Moberley, holding out both hands to her warmly welcome guest.—"Bell, poke the fire.—You see we are having blind-man's holiday; but, indeed, you find us all sad invalids; we caught shocking colds on Christmas-day. Bell's has gone to her face"—(and, indeed, to a close observer, Miss Moberley's countenance does present a rhomboid or gibbous appearance)—"Diana's to her throat. The night before last we were quite frightened, she could scarce swallow; mine to my chest—bark! bark! bark! it tears me to pieces! Joan is the only one of us that is hale and sound—nothing ails Joan!"

"Nothing ails Miss Joan, eh?" says Mr. Brand, glancing down at the little regal head; up and down whose burnished hair the red fire-gleams are at merry play; at the long lily neck, meek, yet proud, too; at the large white eyelids, so obstinately drooped; and speaking in that tone of confident jocosity which he never dares employ when *tête-à-tête* with Miss Dering; but which he mostly uses when backed by the support and presence of the Moberley family. "Nothing ails Miss Joan, eh?—that is well!"

Joan makes no sort of rejoinder. She never answers Mr. Brand unless he puts a point-blank question to her; and even then she seldom spares him anything larger than a "yes" or a "no."

"You are as welcome as flowers in May," cries Mrs. Moberley, whose voice has already regained three-fourths of its normal joviality.—"Regy! Algy! Charlie! I am ashamed of you! make room, sirs, make room!—And, if you have brought us a bit of news, you are welcomer still! We are famished for news."

"Well, I am glad to be able for once in my life to oblige you," replies Micky, with complacent familiarity, holding his broad fingers to the blaze and chafing them; "for, as it happens, I have a piece of news—a large new piece."

"Not really?"

"You are not joking?"

"What is it?" in three separate but simultaneous volleys.

"Ah, that is telling!" answers Micky, with a tantalizing school-boy laugh; "you must guess."

"I hope it is not any stupid public news!" says Bell, suspicious; "nothing about the ministry or the budget, or any-

thing tiresome of that kind; I do not call that news."

"It is not public news."

"Is it about anybody we know?" asks Diana, her fears taking a slightly different direction from her sister's.

"It is about somebody whom we all know—even Miss Joan," with a rather vindictive look at the silent figure, which has not changed its posture by a hair's breadth, or, beyond a cold hand-shake, shown any consciousness of his presence.

"Bobby Butler has exchanged?"

"Jackson has got his step?"

"Or is going to be married?" suggests Mrs. Moberley, with a jolly laugh. "I do love to hear of a marriage! After all" (with a sigh), "it is much the happiest state!"

"Go to the top of the class," cries Micky, facetiously; "you are nearest the mark! It is a marriage, but it is not Jackson! it is not" (looking reassuringly round on the girls)—"it is not any of us!"

"Not any of you?" echoes Bell, in a tone of mixed relief and disappointment; for, if Mr. Brand has thus taken all potential sting out of his intelligence, he has also robbed it of its strongest element of excitement. "It is about some one who thinks himself a very much greater man than any of *us!*" continues Micky, with a rather spiteful intonation. "I should be sorry to buy him at his own valuation, and sell him at mine. There! I have given you a lead now!"

"Not Wolferstan!" "Not Anthony!" "Not the colonel!" cry the three women, starting suddenly upright in their chairs, with wide eyes and panting breasts.

Mr. Brand nods. "Right you are! it is Wolferstan."

There is an awed silence. Mrs. Moberley is the first to break it.

"Caught at last!" she says, shaking her head several times, and speaking with a pensive accent. "Well, well! I should not wonder if he left a good many sore hearts behind him. Bonny fellow! he was not given those gray eyes for nothing."

"And who is the lady?" asks Bell, with a large sigh; "somebody high, no doubt?—a member of the peerage, I should not wonder?"

"Nothing of the kind!" replies the young man, brusquely; "a plain 'miss,' like anybody else. I know nothing of her"—(in a somewhat hold-cheap voice)—"no more, I should fancy, do you; though they say that she was staying at the Abbey in the autumn; possibly you may have seen her drive by. *Beauchamp*—or some such name."

"Seen her drive by, indeed!" cries Bell, magnificently tossing her mane; "why of course we know her! I should think we did—of course we have met at the Abbey."

"She was there the only time we ever dined there," puts in Diana, hastily; "but she never spoke to or took the least notice of us."

Joan is the only one of the party whom Mr. Brand's information has apparently not galvanized. At his news—(though certainly it must be news to her too)—no smallest exclamation passes her lips. When he spoke, she was stroking Mr. Brown. She is stroking him still. Her little white hand is passing slowly down his back from his neck, along his tawny coat to his tail, and so again. The only difference is, that then it was a conscious action; now it is an absolutely unconscious one.

What a long way off these people's voices sound! Surely Micky's laugh must be in the next county, at least! Are they dreadful dream-people? Is this a dream-dog that is licking her fingers?

"It is quite an old affair, I am told," pursues Mr. Brand, affably beginning to ornament his main fact with supplementary details; "he has been sighing ten years, it seems!"

"I always thought he looked as if he had a history," says Bell, in her south-

wind voice; "if you remember, I said so."

"I do not believe a word of it!" cries Diana, darting one hasty lightning-glance toward her cousin, and speaking with trembling young voice and poppy-red cheeks; "as he is the only person of the least consequence in the neighborhood, they must always be talking of him: sometimes they marry him; sometimes they make him elope with other people's wives; sometimes they break his ribs out hunting; and never—never is there the least grain of truth in it!"

"I am sorry to be obliged to contradict a lady!" rejoins Mr. Brand, affably still, though with a slight streak of offense in his tone at having the authenticity of his intelligence impugned; "but, if I tell you that it came from Mrs. Wolferstan herself, you will perhaps allow that his mother is not unlikely to be well informed."

"She will be old Mrs. Wolferstan, now, really," says Bell, simpering, "in contradistinction to young Mrs. Wolferstan. I wonder how she will like that?"

"I recollect her now, perfectly!" cries Mrs. Moberley, in a tone of victory, having apparently during the last few moments been raking in the ashes of her memory for Miss Beauchamp; "a dashing-looking girl, with fine falling shoulders!—a shade too stout, perhaps, but that is a criticism that comes ill from me, you will say!" (with a good-humored laugh).

"And when is it to be?" asks Bell, in her softest stock-dove tone, suited to the tender theme. "Is there any time named? Easter? Whitsun?"

"Easter! Whitsun!" repeats Mr. Brand, derisively. "Do you think that a man who has been languishing ten years is likely to defer his bliss much longer? It is to be at once! at once! You may depend on the accuracy of my information!" (with a rather defiant glance toward Diana). "I make a point of never repeating mere *on-dits*."

"There will be plenty of gay doings, no doubt!" cries Mrs. Moberley, a frisky sparkle in her eye, scenting the carnage from afar, like a glad old vulture. "They kept it up pretty well when he came of age; and of course there will be double as much now!—a man's marriage is twice as important an event as his majority, any day."

"The one he can help, the other he cannot!" says Micky, with levity.

"Joan!" cries Bell, in a tone of ecstasy; "Joan, you were right!—you prophesied that something would spring up for us, from a quarter we least expected! I believe you were in the secret!"

"Miss Joan has not given us her opinion yet!" says Mr. Brand, eying Miss Dering with that mixture of hurt vanity and loath admiration with which he usually regards her. "We have not heard the sound of your voice yet, Miss Joan! Have you nothing to say?"

At his voice Joan starts a little and slightly shivers. One of these dream-people is speaking to her, and she must answer him. Even at this numb moment some instinct of self-preservation—(in her present half-stunned state it can scarcely be more than instinct)—prompts her to pull herself together; feebly to lay hold of whatever defensive armor she can find against Micky Brand's pity—against the compassion of the barracks. By a great effort of will she even forces the color to stay in her cheeks—enough color, at least, in this kind and shifty firelight, to save her from the imputation of any excessive or livid pallor. She curves her disobedient lips into a stiff, set smile.

"You were all talking so fast!" she says, in a low, quick voice—(but then her voice is always low, never in highest excitement shrill or clamorous). "I was waiting for an opening. What does one say when one hears that one's acquaintances are going to be married?—that one is very glad? that one hopes it will turn out well? that one wishes they would

send over some wedding-cake?—I am so fond of wedding-cake!—You are too, are not you, Aunt Moberley?"

"There are worse things!" replies Mrs. Moberley, tersely; "but—(shaking her head)—"they never send cake now, I am told!—however" (in more buoyant tone), "perhaps the colonel may make an exception in favor of you; you and he were always rather friends, and indeed"—(with a little accent of harmless complacence)—"I do not think he disliked any of us!"

"No, he did not dislike any of us!" repeats Joan, in a mechanical parrot-tone.

"I wonder now," continues Mrs. Moberley in a voice of brisk and alert interest, "whether it is in the Helmsley paper this week!—the *Courier* gets hold of anything wonderfully soon.—Diana, run and ask whether the *Courier* has come yet."

"May Joan go instead of me?" asks Diana, hastily, and reddening again; "I—I—I am afraid of the draughts for my cold!"

With a feeling of vague, blunt gratitude Joan rises and walks steadily to the door. Once outside it, she reels and staggers against the wall. The sickly gas-jet is multiplied to a hundred, which all seem to be dancing and flaring round her. Is she going to faint? What! fall down, and cause them all to come running out and find her swooned, and to guess, not obscurely, the cause? She will die first! She totters to the stairs, and, holding tightly to the banisters, slowly climbs to the upper story.

In her own garret she will at least find solitude and darkness. But will she? As she opens the door, a light strikes upon her dismayed eyes, the light of a tallow-candle set on the floor beside Sarah, who, in a bear-like and plantigrade attitude, is executing some repairs on the veteran drugget. What malign spirit has prompted her, to-day of all days, to this exercise of unwonted and untimely industry, who shall say? Joan softly recloses the door, with something of the feeling with which—we may suppose—a hard-run fox finds his earth stopped. Whither can she turn? She dare not betake herself to the girls' room; at any moment they may come flying up-stairs, and find her face in the dishabille of its utter despair. She descends the stairs again, and when she has reached the foot her eyes fall on the door that leads to the garden. In a moment she has opened it—it is never locked—and now, hatless, cloakless, and protectionless, stands in the wintry weather outside.

The night is pitch dark. It clothes her round like a soft, close vesture. Dark as it is, she knows so well every inch of the little territory, that now, without any hesitation or faltering, she makes her way between the inky flower-beds—over the dark, invisible grass to the sundial. At its base she falls down. Her arms encircle its dark pillar. Her delicate flower-face is pressed against the cold and obdurate stone. At least, on this January night, they will not think of seeking her here! For some time she lies half unconscious; then, by-and-by, the raw air, piercing through her gown and chilling her blood officiously, recalls her to life.

"Already—already!" she says, with a moan; "it is too soon! indeed, it is too soon! if he had had any humanity, he would have waited a little!—with a whole long life ahead of him—he could afford to wait!"

Another interval. After a while she sits upright, shuddering a little. The nipping wind has brought her back to full consciousness, more quickly than any cordial could have done. A shiver—half of physical cold, half of utter forlornness—shakes her slight body from head to foot. Her woful head falls forward on her knees. This pain is coming to her now in all its sharpness; she has no narcotic to dull it.

"Unstable as water!" she says, with a groan; then, with a most bitter, heart-wrung smile: "Why do I blame him? he could not help it! it was his instinct!

does one blame any animal for following its instinct? it was his way!—and now this is his way too!—O God! why do you allow people to have such ways?" Another longer pause; then, in a broken voice of utter tenderness: "Oh, my dear, I do not blame you! it was my own doing! Great God! are not all the things that hurt us most our own doing?"

She is shivering violently, and her teeth chatter with the cold; this January blast cuts like a knife. She is glad. The discomfort of her body mitigates a little the misery of her soul. She does not know how long she has remained thus, when a noise rouses her; the sound of the front-door opened and again shut; footsteps crunching the wet gravel of the drive; the dogs pattering and bow-wowing after Mr. Brand, to see him well off the premises. Probably—nay, certainly, their noses will scent her out here, and discover her. From the inside of the house she hears a voice loudly and gayly calling: "Joan! Joan! where are you? what have you done with the *Courier*? Joan! Joan!"

She raises herself to her feet. How black this night is! when she stretches out her hand before her she cannot see it; and yet to-morrow it will be drawn away like a veil from the earth's face; it will be swept away, abolished, blotted out. Oh, that she might be abolished, blotted out too—this Joan that is all pain! oh that the night would carry her too away in the sweep of its ebon skirts!

## CHAPTER XXXI.

The enormous winter night has trailed its slow length away; the puny winter dawn is tardily showing its ash-gray face above the horizon. All night Joan has been wrestling with her woe; and, when the sickly new sun looks dimly in at her frozen window-pane, he finds her palely victorious. Victorious, not indeed over pain, for that bids to be long-lived; not over love, for that is deathless, but over self. All night through she has struggled and striven; all night her meagre pillow has been drenched with her hot salt tears; all night ugly and maddening visions of her dear love with another head than hers on his broad breast, with other arms than hers laced about his neck, float, painted on the canvas of the dark, before her streaming eyes. All night she has cried out that the cup is too bitter—that the knife is too sharp—that, whether God or man have done it, it is very ill done; and lo! when morning comes, the cup is emptied to the dregs; the knife is sheathed in her quivering heart, and she, with a victor's wan smile, says, "It is well!"

In very little more than four months, he has forgotten and replaced her; he that, with such wet gray eyes, with such a broken voice, swore that whether on Time's shore, or Eternity's gray strand, his arms would always be outstretched to receive her. So be it! If it is more for his well-being and comfort to forget than to remember, then this is well done too.

She has poured out all her costliest pearls at his feet; and he—he has tossed her a few paltry beads, that broke in the handling. What then? They were the best he had. And what has true love to do with the worth of the loved? It does not weigh out in drachms and scruples; so many grains to this virtue; so many to that grace; it gives bountifully with both hands. She has given to him bountifully with both hands; and what she has given she can by no means take back.

"To love is the great glory, the last culture, the highest happiness; to be loved is little in comparison!"

Because God has set her among the lonely ones of this earth; those who come first in no one's prayers; who have no stake in the coming generation, would she destine him also to this gray doom—this parched half-life? a fate which some-

times ennobles and makes more selfless a woman, but almost always worsens a man! If this be love, then away with such love, that is featured like hate! Down with it! down with it into the dust!

"God keep you, Anthony!" she said to him, when they kissed each other weepingly by the curling moonlit waves. "God keep you, Anthony!" she says still.

Yes, God keep him! in his bliss now, as in his pain then—the pain was so short and easily physicked!

. . . . . .

Joan is dressed now. She has been standing for five minutes before her looking-glass, with a Turkish towel in her hand; trying whether severest friction can bring any color that will stay longer than two seconds into her ashy cheeks. For indeed the face that the glass—the one with the crack across it—gives her back, frightens even herself. Purple, thickened eyelids, swollen to double their natural size; dim buried eyes, whose very color seems to be washed away from iris and pupil; a little miserable pinched nose, and tremulous blue lips.

"Since this time yesterday I have added ten years to my age," she says, aloud; "I might well pass for thirty: at this rate, by Saturday, I shall be eighty; and not a well-preserved eighty either!"

She smiles bitterly; then, making a grim reverence to her own image: "Marie Antoinette on her way to the scaffold!" she says; "is the parallel complete? has my hair turned gray, too?"

She puts her face closer to the decrepit mirror, and, lifting the thick sleek hair that overlies her milk-white brow, pries curiously among its burnished strands. No! grief, that has ravaged her face, has passed harmlessly by her love-locks. They still look young and happy.

"I must sit with my back to the light!" she says, replacing the Turkish towel on its rail in despair. "Even this expedient—not even the shabby yellow light of a January morning—not even the preoccupation of her family, save her from the observation that she dreads.

"I will say, Joan," remarks Mrs. Moberley, regarding her niece with that steadfastness of stare, that unblenching continuity of gaze which it is the triste prerogative of near relations to employ toward each other—"I will say, Joan, that I never saw any one whom hard weather suited so ill as it does you; I could not have believed that a healthy English girl could be so shriveled up by a few degrees of frost! now, if you had taken my advice, and put on flannel waistcoats at the beginning of the winter: or, if not flannel—some people cannot bear the feel of flannel next their skin—if not flannel, those nice spun silk ones—"

"I should have been quite a fine woman by now—rosy and well-nourished—a credit to the establishment!" interrupts Joan, with a laugh—a real *bona fide* voluntary laugh. She would have laughed had she been by herself, with no one to look on, at the idea of this new nostrum for a love-pain—flannel waistcoats for a broken heart! "No! no!"—(shaking her head)—"I am afraid not! I am afraid I am a radical constitutional scarecrow!"

"I declare it looks as if we starved you!" pursues Mrs. Moberley, fuming, and eying with extreme dissatisfaction her niece's languid, willowy figure, and small lily-pale face.

"Do you think that change of air would do me good?" asks Joan, lifting her heavy eyes to her aunt's large and disturbed countenance; "you know many doctors think it a sovereign remedy!—no, I am not joking; I have been reflecting that perhaps, after all, I had better close with the offer, over which I have been so long demurring, of that lady in ——shire; the salary is certainly very small—almost invisibly so" (with a pale smile)—"and so are the children, it seems; probably I shall not be much more than a *bonne*, but everything must have a be-

ginning; it is a mistake to be too nice, and—and—perhaps this air *is* too keen for me!"

"What!" cries Mrs. Moberley, stopping dead short in her occupation of softly and slowly chafing her spectacle-glasses with her pocket-handkerchief—"what! run away just as all these gay doings are coming on?—such doings as, in all probability, Helmsley will not see again for another five-and-twenty years—not until" (with a laugh)—"not until the next Anthony Wolferstan comes of age!"

Joan turns her head away sick and shuddering. Her aunt's words seem to have opened a window into Wolferstan's future—a window through which she, standing outside in the cold—always outside in the cold—may peep and see his unshared felicity, the warm every-day human bliss of which she will make no smallest part. It is a moment or so before she can master her voice. Then she speaks:

"It does seem a pity," she answers, tranquilly, "but you see my year of mourning is not ended yet; I should be sorry to go to anything very gay before that had expired; so perhaps it is as well to be out of the way of temptation."

"*Your year of mourning!*" repeats Mrs. Moberley, with a withering emphasis; "who ever heard of shutting one's self up a whole year for a grandfather? what more could you do, pray, if he had been your husband?—well, well!" (in a voice which aims at, but misses an indifferent and impartial candor of tone); "well, well! it is your business, not mine! but I will say that, of late days, everything seems to have turned topsy-turvy! it is not one here, and one there; but *all* the gray heads are on the green shoulders! when I was your age, there would not have been much need to dragoon *me* to a ball!"

So Joan has her sad will, and girds up her loins once more to breast the stormy waves of this world's troublesome sea alone. It will be to her probably a harsher, rougher world than has been that small, slatternly, yet kindly one, to whose tender mercies she was consigned one yellow April evening, now nearly nine months ago. And yet to her own heart she says that she defies any new nine months to bring her such deep and varied pain—such pin-pricks of humiliation—such sword-thrusts of agony as the last nine months have done. By the next post she signs herself away into bondage—bondage certainly—though what degree or manner of bondage she herself hardly cares to speculate. Pay pitiful! position menial! So be it. The only thing with regard to her new life, that seems to Miss Dering of the least account, is, that the scene of it should be laid as far as possible from the sound of Helmsley church-bells. Whither?—nay—any whither, so as to be beyond the reach of Anthony's joy-bells.

It is well that Joan has steeled herself not only to hear but to pronounce her late lover's name, without any quiver of eyelid, flutter of color, or uncertainty of voice; for, henceforward, for many days, that name is seldom absent for five minutes together from one or other of the tongues of the Portland Villa household. Colonel Wolferstan and his betrothed divide between them the honor of forming the staple of the Moberley talk. Every half-hour now brings some fresh and authentic piece of information on the all-engrossing topic; and every new half-hour contradicts and repudiates its predecessor.

"The marriage is to take place next week!" "It is not to take place for six months!" "The ceremony is to be performed at Westminster Abbey!" "It is to be performed at St. George's, Hanover Square!" "It is to be performed by special license in their own drawing-room!" "There are to be six bridesmaids in veils and wreaths!" "There are to be twelve bridesmaids in bonnets!" "There are to be no bridesmaids at all!" "The young couple are to live with the old people at the Abbey!" "The young

couple are to build a house for themselves on the Wolferstan estate in ——shire!" "The young couple are to travel for a year!" "He has been in love with her for ten years!" "They were betrothed in their cradles!" "They met for the first time last autumn!" etc., etc.

By-and-by these rumors become both fewer and more harmonious. They contract and shrink into the following compact body of certainties:

The marriage is to take place in a fortnight, the ceremony is to be performed at St. James's, Piccadilly. One right reverend, one venerable, and two reverends, are to tie the knot. The wedding-feast is to be held at the family residence in Dover Street. Beeves are to die and ale-casks to be broached for the regaling of the day-laborers and cotters on the Wolferstan estate on the wedding-day; but all such festivities as regard the gentry, tradespeople, and farmers, are to be reserved till the return of the wedded lovers from their honey-moon.

Is not there food enough here for speculation, for hope, for joy? The days fly past—Joan counts them as they go. There is neither pleasure nor profit in them, yet would she fain weight them with lead. To every setting sun she bids good-by with a sicker heart. On every tardy dawn she opens more unwilling eyes. The church-bells have already begun to practise their peals; every evening she can hear the ringers perfecting themselves in their carillons.

It is the eve of the wedding now. All day the rain has streamed down upon the sloppy earth; all Nature is of the consistency of porridge. Rain pure and simple, rain mixed with sleet, rain pure and simple again. Joan has longed with an unutterable longing for fresh air, for solitude, for the sea—the wrathy, masterful, winter sea—

> "For her heart was heavy—oh!
> Heavy was her heart!"

But all three are equally unattainable. The short, dwarfed day is drawing and she stands by the window looking toward the west. The sun, hidden all day, is giving one puny shadow of a good-night smile before sinking into his gray billow-bed; the sun which, when next he waxes, will shine upon Anthony's nuptial pomp. Mrs. Moberley has drawn up her chair to the window, too, to make the most of the waning light, and, with spectacles astride on her nose, is reading aloud, in short-winded recitative, the Helmsley paper, which has just arrived:

"'For the information of our fair readers we may state that the bride's dress will be of white satin trimmed with Brussels lace. The bridesmaids will be the Lady Alicia Kerr and the Lady Mabel Kerr, cousins of the bridegroom, and the Honorable Letitia Wentworth and the Honorable Susan Wentworth, cousins of the bride. We understand that the bridesmaids' dresses will be of white *poult de soie*, polonaises of white *damassé*, trimmed with white ostrich-feathers, white Rubens felt hats trimmed with ostrich-feathers. The bridegroom's best man will be his brother, Mr. Fulke Wolferstan!' And then come the presents. Dear me! three columns of them. Why, there must be over two hundred!"

"Are there many Helmsley names?" asks Bell, looking over her mother's shoulder at the list of donors; "I wish that we had given something—any trifle just to show good-will—and people will be sure to look for our names; knowing on what intimate terms we were with him."

"How badly they print these things nowadays!" says Mrs. Moberley, holding the paper at arm's length and staring hard at it through her spectacles.—"Here, Joan, you are doing nothing—your eyes are younger than mine—read us aloud the list of the presents!"

Joan turns heavily away from the window, and, taking the paper from her aunt's hand, complies:

"'The Marchioness of Caledon, bracelet, gold and pearl; the Countess of Dor-

set, *parure*, emeralds and diamonds; the Honorable Lady Landon, pendant, opals and diamonds,'" and so on for three columns. They swim before her eyes now and then—the pendants, the tiaras, the chatelaines, the *étuis*—but she holds out gallantly till the end, till the tale, begun so gloriously with a marchioness and a bracelet, dwindles away into a miss and a blotting-book.

"What a number of great people they seem to know!" says Mrs. Moberley, in a respectful voice; "and I am sure that you would never guess it from Anthony's conversation. I do not think I ever heard him mention a member of the peerage in my life!"

"What a number of bracelets!" cries Bell, with an envious sigh. "How many, Joan? Count!"

Joan complies.

"There are twenty-one!"

"She may put on a fresh one every day for three weeks!" says Bell, with the rapidity of a ready-reckoner. "What luck some people have!"

"And how many lockets, Joan?" asks Diana, leaning her elbows on the table, and framing her little eager, rosy face with her dimpled hands.

Joan's slender finger travels up the column once again.

"There are fourteen!"

"She may put on a new one every day for a fortnight!" says Diana, drawing a long breath; "and then they tell you that happiness is equally divided!"

"But has the bridegroom given nothing?" asks Bell, curiosity, for the moment, getting the better of envy; "are you sure that you have missed nothing, Joan? he must surely have contributed something handsome!"

"Has not he contributed himself?" asks Mrs. Moberley, with a jolly laugh; "I do not think that he could well have contributed anything handsomer! I suppose he thinks that that is enough!"

Joan lays down the paper, shivering a little. Enough?—yes, enough in all conscience!

. . . . . .

Wolferstan's wedding-day has come. No longer *coming*, it has *come*. It is here. No more need Joan's eyes grudgingly watch the breaking of each new dawn; no more need her sad wishes try to delay the fall of each new night. Dread is no more, for the dreaded has arrived. And Joan is still at Portland Villa. Fate, after all, will not spare her the hearing of Anthony's wedding-chimes. At the last moment her employer has put her off, intimating that she will not require her to enter upon her duties till after the expiration of another month. So Joan stays.

In the relations between masters and servants, it is the servants who can dictate terms, and the masters who must come into them. Nowadays, he or she who neglects to obey his or her cook's lightest whim, may, in all likelihood, go cookless to the end of the chapter; but in the education-market matters are widely different. In the latter the supply is as immensely in excess of the demand as in the former the demand is in excess of the supply.

Anthony's wedding-day has come. Neither God nor man has stepped in to prevent it; and the sun, which for a fortnight past has shone for neither king nor tinker, shines for him. The sun and Anthony were always friends. Almost all Joan's recollections of him are mixed with fair weather and sunshine. She has opened her window that looks to the dim-red east. She herself has sunk down on her knees beside the poor bed, with arms outflung over the worn counterpane and ruffled brown head down sunk upon them.

"Oh, love! love!" she says, with an exceeding bitter cry; "God give you fair weather always! God save you from pain like this! God lift you to the higher life!"

The tears rush in hot salt plenty to

her eyes, but she commands them back. To-day of all days, God wot, she must be dry-eyed and merry. Throughout the morning an electrical river of excitement seems to be running in the Moberleys' veins. Employment of any sort seems impossible to them, nor do they attempt any. With eyes turned alternately to the clock, and to the prayer-books opened at the marriage-service, on their laps, Mrs. Moberley and Bell (for Diana is, for the most part, quiescent) follow the bridal party step by step, through the programme announced by the Helmsley journal.

"They must have reached the church by now, Bell!—how many carriages, I wonder? nearly all private ones, I dare say?"

"They must be arranged before the altar now; I hope the bridegroom has not forgotten the ring."

"As likely as not this very minute she is saying, 'I will;' I hope she speaks up—I do like a bride to speak up."

"I can almost hear him say, 'I, Anthony, take thee, Lalage!' Dear me! what lovely names!—and they go so well together." After a while: "We ought to hear the bells soon! they were to telegraph down the moment it was over, so that they might strike up here at once!'

Bell has opened the window in order the better to hear. The crisp air comes in with a cold rush, but who can be cold to-day?

"It is one o'clock!" cries Bell, with a lengthening face; "I cannot account for it!—can anything have happened—anything at the last moment to prevent it?"

At her words Joan's sick heart gives a great bound; and the foolish carnation color rushes to her lily cheeks. Is it just possible?—it is not likely—nothing is less likely—but still such things have happened! As she so thinks, pushing away and yet involuntarily fostering the exquisite mad hope, the listeners' strained ears are suddenly smitten by a sharp and merry noise; and, in a moment, the whole air is full of the clangor of a resonant din: all the joy-bells from the three church-towers shaking out their triumphant music—that, when most joyous, is yet sad—on the ready wind.

"It is all right!" cries Bell, in a tone of rapturous relief, drawing a long breath; "I declare the suspense was beginning to make me feel quite hysterical!"

"It is a *faitaccomply!*" says Mrs. Moberley, solemnly, making one long English word out of the two French ones; "Anthony is a married man!—not all the king's horses and all the king's men can set Humpty Dumpty up again!—Why, Joan, though you kept so quiet, I believe you were as excited as any of us; why, child, you are as white as a sheet!"

"Am I not always white?" asks Joan, in a tone of angry and impatient agony, for indeed her cup is over-full; "O Aunt Moberley, if you would but make up your mind that I am always white!"

## CHAPTER XXXII.

THUS Wolferstan is wed. The *Helmsley Courier* devotes three columns to the describing of his and his wife's deportment on the occasion; of how they were clad, who wed them, and who looked on. The *Morning Post*, the *Court Journal*, and half a dozen other papers, have also each and all something to say on this subject; and all these notices Joan has to read aloud to her aunt, and does so read them, with an unfaltering voice, and, where it appears seemly and probable that she should do so, makes comments on them. But the wedding is now deposed from its supremacy of interest. The past has ever few courtiers in comparison with the future. The honey-moon is drawing toward its close, and Joan is still at Portland Villa. Each day her hope of escaping before the dreaded epoch of Wolferstan's return has grown more sick-

ly; now it is dead. She has heard his wedding-bells. For days after they ceased pealing she hears them still. Sometimes she hears them now at the deadest hour of night deafening her ears. She has heard, and now Fate wills that she shall also see.

The day finally decided upon for her departure is—oh, irony of destiny!—the one after that fixed for the bride-people's return, and the fancy ball which is to grace it, instead of, as she had ardently prayed, the one before. Our eye speaks much more loudly and distinctly to us than does our ear. It seems to Joan that what she has already endured is as nothing compared with what she will suffer when seeing with bodily eyes that felicity of which she yet already knows.

The honey-moon nears its end; it is to be literally only a moon. The young people are to be allowed no margin; they are to be strictly tied down to their four weeks, at the end of which time they are to make their triumphant entry into their paternal home. They are to be dragged from the station by their tenants (oh, most trist and humiliating of compliments! the apprehension of which must, I think, deter many an eldest son from marrying, or, at least, from ever bringing home his bride). Flags are to wave for them, arches are to tower above them, party-colored poles to rise to their glory, and in the evening the Abbey-doors are to be thrown wide open to admit so great a crowd as even its wide rooms will scarcely contain; a crowd embracing everything with the slenderest claims to gentility in all the country round, and in Helmsley itself.

"A regular popularity affair," says Mrs. Moberley, with a slightly discontented accent. "A sort of thing that it is no kind of compliment to be asked to! everybody is asked—hightums, tightums, scrubs!"

"Scrubs, at all events, we will hope," says Diana, with a dry smile, "else our chance is but small."

It is nearing rapidly now. Every milliner and seamstress in Helmsley is working double tides; for this is no common ball, for which the purchase of a few yards of tulle or tarlatan will fit you, but a fancy ball—rigorously fancy, to which you must come travestied, or not come at all. The problem which is employing the brains of all Helmsley—the maximum of magnificence and originality with the minimum of expense—is taxing the wits of the artless family at Portland Villa, perhaps more severely than any other in the country-side.

In the case of Arabella, indeed, there is no difficulty. It has not taken her two seconds to decide upon the character she will personate. She will be a *vivandière*, and is already reveling, by anticipation, in the glories of her warlike jacket, pert cap, and little barrel. For one evening she may be almost mistaken for a soldier. Diana's heart has at first seriously leaned toward a like costume, but out of this inclination Joan has succeeded in coaxing her.

"They do not admit uniforms!" says Micky, in a grumbling tone, as he sits sucking the top of his stick and staring into the fire. "A great mistake; a uniform goes everywhere."

"You can easily evade it by going as a boiled lobster," cries Diana, with levity, but Mr. Brand does not laugh.

"I thought of going as the master of Ravenswood," he continues, in a complaining tone—"a very effective dress, I am told; but there is a rumor that Wolferstan himself has adopted it. It would not do to clash with the bridegroom, I suppose, so now I am at sea again."

"Shake hands, then," says Mrs. Moberley, holding out a plump hand across the hearth to him, "for so am I. We have all been racking our brains to find some character that will suit a stout figure. There must have been stout people in the world before me" (laughing)—"but we cannot, for the life of us, think of any."

"I shall be Mother. Hubbard," cries Diana, gayly, sitting down on the hearth-rug, and drawing Mr. Brown toward her, Mr. Brown half asleep, and, consequently, rather short in the temper—"I shall be Mother Hubbard, and Mr. Brown shall be my dog!—Do you hear, Joan? Mr. Brown is going to the fancy ball as Mother Hubbard's dog, so please make a suit of clothes for him at once."

"The Black Prince! the Douglas! Cœur de Lion!" says Micky, over, in a monotonous undertone to himself, as his eye still tries to wrest some inspiration from the fire's heart. "I have a good mind to be Cœur de Lion—I do not think that there will be another—I shall be the only one."

"Why need you be a king or a big-wig of any kind?" asks Diana, bluntly, still framing with her hands Mr. Brown's deeply unwilling face, and bringing his wrinkles into unnatural and monstrous prominence. "Why cannot you be something ridiculous? It would be so much more amusing! I always like the idea of the clergyman who went to a fancy ball in full canonicals, with his curate after him as Beelzebub. You are not a curate, but why should not you be Beelzebub?"

But this suggestion finds no manner of favor in Mr. Brand's eyes.

. . . . . .

Indecision is at an end now, at all events. Last stitches are being set, costumes tremblingly tried on and final alterations made—for the fateful day has come. The arches are complete to the last leaf—shining evergreen and varnished holly—they stride across street and road. The show school-child has been armed with her bouquet. The big cardboard "Welcomes!" and "Health and Happinesses!" have all been pasted on their red cloth, and set up over the lodge-gates to give their staring greeting. The train by which the bridal couple are to arrive reaches Helmsley at 2 P. M. Long before that hour the Misses Moberley, under the escort of Micky, have set off for the town, so as to be in ample time to witness the expected entry.

From this ordeal Joan is saved by an unexpected stroke of luck. Fate, unkind so long, is kind at last, and sends her a heavy, unmistakable cold—a cold about which there is no malingering, and in which the most skeptical cannot refuse to believe. Perhaps she is not very much the gainer, after all. She will not thereby escape the sight of Anthony, for does not the *cortége* pass the very gate of Portland Villa? and to refuse to look out at it would be at once to confess that very secret which she has been guarding so long, so jealously, and with such infinite pains.

Mrs. Moberley and Joan remained behind, but though her daughters have gone and she has staid, yet is Mrs. Moberley's excitement no whit inferior to theirs. She is up and down twenty times in a minute, from door to window, from window to door, and when the hour draws nigh at which the *cortége* may reasonably be expected to appear—she even goes a step farther, and passes out into the road, where she stands, with hand shading her eyes, while the winter wind coldly frolics with her cap-lappets—gazing eagerly at the turn of the road which is to give to view the desired equipage. But, gaze as she may, no such equipage appears. The time goes by, and Mrs. Moberley's hopes decline through the several degrees of confident expectation and doubt, till, at last, they reach the nadir of despair.

"There must have been an accident!" she says, while her jovial round face pales and lengthens. "I declare I am quite upset—there must have been an accident to the train!"

"Joan is trembling all over like a leaf. The strain all the morning has been almost more than she can bear. The necessity for making light, cheerful, and interested answers to her aunt's foolish and incessant questions and ejaculations has tried her strength to its very outside

limit. By this time she can no longer manage her voice, and "I hope not! I hope not!" in a very low key, is all she can say.

By-and-by, the girls coming bustling in again, with faces reddened by exercise and triumph, brimming over with spirits and excitement, sufficiently prove that there has been no catastrophe or *contre-temps*. They are both talking at once, and at the very top of their voices; but Bell's, being the stronger organ, drowns and effaces her sister's weaker one.

"We had the best possible view!" she cries, exultantly; "I could not have wished for a better; I was as close to them as I am to you; I could have put out my hand and touched the carriage; the town was so gay — you would not have known it—flags out of every window—quite like fairy-land!"

She stops for a moment, out of breath; but instantly resumes—afraid, perhaps, of Diana's usurping the speakership:

"The carriage came along High Street at a foot's pace, and there they were bowing right and left, quite like royalty!"

"They, indeed!" cries Diana, ironically; "*she* was waggling her head like a mandarin, it is true; but *he*—he scarcely stirred, except to take off his hat to one or two people that he knew! He leaned back, looking as white as death, and with his hat pulled down over his eyes!"

"But why did not they come past here?" inquires Mrs. Moberley, raising her voice, resolute to outscream her daughters, and have her question answered at any price; "they have never passed by us at all—have they, Joan? I never was so disappointed in my life! no more was Joan!"

Arabella shrugs her shoulders. "It was a whim of his! nobody could account for it; he would have them go to the West Lodge instead: it put the people out a good deal, as it is half a mile farther out of the way; and, of course, as they were not expected, there were no arches or anything there; but he would have it so! I cannot think what possessed him!"

"Dear me! how odd!" says Mrs. Moberley, in a tone of curious reflection; "I hope that there is nothing wrong about his head! I hope he is not going like his father, poor old gentleman!"

Joan has turned away to the window; her heart beating hard and quick. It is contracted by an agony of pain, that is yet tinged by a most bitter joy. He has at least enough feeling for her left to make him unwilling to display his new felicity right under her aching eyes.

The evening has come now; the evening, whose closing in has been so eagerly watched. The hour at which the Abbey-doors are to be thrown open has arrived; the guests are flocking in. Already the road is full of carriages—carriages going—carriages returning. Gayly their red lamps shine through the black night. The Moberleys are in the very act of departure. For ten minutes Joan has been on her knees; putting in last stitches, and important pins, and doing crowning acts of embellishment; whispering also hopes, and soothing misgivings where there are any to be soothed. In Miss Moberley's case there are none. Fully equipped in scarlet jacket, gold-lace, and short petticoats; with her barrel on her back, and her cap set well on one side upon her large head, she is enjoying such a happy confidence that she is representing the character she has undertaken to personate with glory and fidelity, that no adverse criticisms — were any such forthcoming—could have power to move her from her blest complacence. But Diana, as Bo-peep, is reveling in no such resolute self-satisfaction. She has been unable to enact the part of Mother Hubbard, after all; as, at the last moment, Mr. Brown refuses to appear before the world as Mother Hubbard's dog. She has, therefore, at Joan's persuasion, chosen the part of Bo-peep instead.

At the present moment, Joan is standing beside her cousin, firmly fastening on her blond head a dainty straw hat, cunningly rose-wreathed; such a hat as tradition has always connected with the memory of the lady who lost her sheep. Joan, indeed, is eying the whole of Bopeep with something of a parent's or creator's pride; for is not the hat—are not the cherry-colored petticoat and the flowered chintz sacque—the work of her own fingers and brains?

"There!" she cries, in a voice of soft and kindly triumph; "I defy any Bopeep to beat mine! Come and look at yourself, Di!" She leads the shy, pleased girl before the glass, and they stand side by side with the eyes of both fixed upon Diana's image; the tall, pale royal lily, and the little blushing hedge-rose.

Joan has spoken truth. Any imposing or pretentious costume—La Vallière, Marquise, Marie Stuart—would have crushed Diana into insignificance; but, as little Bo-peep, with great shy eyes, with round pink-velvet cheeks, dewy red lips, and a woolly lamb, that on extreme pressure, gives utterance to real "Baas," under her arm, she is charming. As to the lamb, that spurious animal has filled the breasts of the dogs with feelings of alternate amazement, bitter indignation, and awe.

Mrs. Moberley has finally decided upon the character of the Queen of Sheba; a character which gives indeed an idea of vague magnificence, but ties one down to no minutiæ of detail. The Queen of Sheba was undoubtedly handsomely dressed; and it is also equally beyond doubt that, at this distance of time, it is impossible to reconstruct her costume with any attempt at accuracy. She *may* have worn a red-velvet gown, something tight for her queenly charms, and a large blond cap variously flowered, and whence a bird-of-paradise plume—generously lent by Diana for the occasion—waves superb but irrelevant. She *may* and she may not. History is silent.

Micky Brand—he is to escort them or "beau" them, as Mrs. Moberley words it—has kept to his last-expressed intention; and, five minutes ago, entered the room—no longer as Micky Brand of the 170th foot—but as the dauntless Plantagenet—Richard of the Lion Heart: a gilt and pasteboard crown, majestic but insecure, since it *will* veer to one side, binds his brows: enormous white-cotton stockings case and define his stout limbs from ankle to waist: a regal mantle of cotton velvet drapes his person, and three large gold lions ramp mightily up his broad back.

They are off now; the Queen of Sheba, Cœur de Lion, *vivandière*, and Bopeep. Joan has seen and heard the last of them; the last of Diana, driving the dogs to a final frenzy of wrathful curiosity, by making her lamb give one last improbable, unlamblike squeak; of Plantagenet, cursing and resettling his diadem, which he has inadvertently bumped against the fly-roof; of the Queen of Sheba, screaming out some last, forgotten directions, to keep the fire up, and not let the dogs get to the cold meat!

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

THEY are gone now; and Joan, having shut the door after them, reënters the empty drawing-room, and, having stirred the fire from red repose into cheerful activity, stands leaning one elbow on the chimney-piece, and poising one foot on the warm fender. Her reflections begin with a laugh. She laughs out loud at the recollection of the back view of Cœur de Lion arming the Queen of Sheba down the narrow passage; and of the care with which he tucked his lions under him in the fly. She may laugh as loud as she pleases, or weep, or shout, or whoop, or make any other vociferous noise for which she feels inclined; for there is not a single soul in the house to hear her.

Besides the dogs, there is no living creature within the walls but herself. The servants are every one gone to see the ball. Joan has resolutely declined to stand in the way of the pleasure of any one of them, and has expressed her entire willingness to keep house for one night, alone.

After all, what danger is there? At the most favorable time Portland Villa does not give the idea of an abode that would very richly reward a burglarious attempt; and to-night of all nights, with the whole neighborhood awake and astir —with the road full of carriages, voices, people—there is, if possible, less peril than ever. The hall-door is locked and chained. The garden-door, it is true, is neither; for the excellent reason that the lock, like most things at Portland Villa, is broken; but who would think of choosing that mode of entry?

Fear is certainly the last emotion that is in Miss Dering's thoughts, as, abandoning her standing posture, she sinks into Mrs. Moberley's arm-chair and plunges herself into reflection. The fire is warm and soothing, and the chair fairly comfortable; yet she feels no inclination for sleep. Her mind is too alert and astir. To-morrow opens a new chapter of her history; to-morrow she travels away to her new home. But the future engages her but little. There will be no pleasure in it, and it is useless to go prematurely to meet pain. Suffering there will undoubtedly be; but, if the same in degree, it will at least be different in kind from that which she has, of late, been enduring. At least this weary double life will be at an end; this outside cheerfulness and inward desolation, these outside smiles and inward tears. If her spirits droop now, none will ask why; if she is silent, no one will offer her a penny for her thoughts; as has ever been the officious and tyrannical custom at Portland Villa.

But it is the past and the present that chiefly form the matter of her meditations; the past, over which now a steady glory of broad even sunshine seems to have settled down, though at the time many a traveling cloud darkened the landscape—many a shower wetted it; but now —in her heart it is laid up all in pure gold. A past that seems to have been made up all of Anthony!—either of happily expecting Anthony, of joyfully holding him company, or of softly recollecting him. And the present. After all, the present binds us with stronger chains than does either his dead brother or his unborn one. Longer—far longer than did either the past or the future, the *now* holds her in its bitter clasp. After all, she might as well have gone to the ball; for, almost as plainly as if she were there, does she hear the merry band—the musicians—scraping, squeaking, twanging. Almost as distinctly as if she were whirling with them does she see the incongruous gay crowd, whirling, flying, jostling, prancing, shambling round; and above the lower throng she sees, too, her love's high head —that head that neither grief nor shame has ever bowed—held well aloft; she sees the flashing of his broad proud eye, and the good-humor of his sunshiny smile. She closes her eyes the better to see him.

The night is wearing on apace. A while ago the hospital-clock's staid voice told the hour of one. It must be half an hour since she took the dogs to bed in the kitchen, since she saw them all turn an innumerable number of unnecessary times before finally snuggling comfortably, nose to tail, each in his separate basket. She has kissed each of their baggy black cheeks—Mr. Brown's last as being dearest—and has returned to the drawing-room.

As she passed the unshuttered passage window, she looked out. A mirk winter night, though it is mid-February, and snowing hard. Poor coachmen! poor horses! The gas is out: nor is there any light in the drawing-room but what the fire gives; and it is not at a blazing, active stage, but has sunk to a sleepy, passive red rest. She is leaning forward now in her

chair with hands spread toward the warmth, and eyes idly gazing at the odd little fire-hills, fire-valleys, fire-gulfs before her, when her ear is suddenly hit by a small but certain noise. The road outside is, for a while, almost as quiet as on an ordinary night; for all the guests have long arrived, and none have yet begun to depart. One grows very familiar with the noises of a house in which one has spent nine months; one can distinguish with nicety between the tones of voice of each bell, each door-hinge, each door-handle. Were it not so grossly improbable—were it mid-day instead of midnight, she would say that that noise was made by the lifting of the latch of the garden-door.

"It is impossible!" she says to herself chidingly; "who were ever known to sit by themselves at dead of night, without hearing some unexplained sound to set their nerves tingling?"

But all the same, her whole soul and life seem to have suddenly passed into her ears. And they have not deceived her. There is no mistake now; there is the undeniable sound of a step in the passage outside—a step which, on reaching the drawing-room door, has paused. Outside that door there is an unknown, unshaped something; and with that *something* she is *tête-à-tête*.

Too terrified to change her position by one hair's-breadth, she sits; still holding her hands to the fire with wide eyes, tensely-strained ears, and a heart that seems as if it would leap through her gown. As she so paralyzedly sits, the door opens softly — opens — opens — (oh, if it would but open more quickly!) — and in the aperture appears, indistinctly seen, fire-light-freaked and shadow-blurred, the figure of a tall man, huddled in a cloak; the figure—and also the face! But whose face? Great God! is she awake? it is Wolferstan's! At first she has no other thought than that either it is one of those solid-seeming and vivid optical delusions which sometimes, even in broad daylight, have been known to people of clear heads and sound wits, or that it is his wraith—his double—which she, by eager and continuous thinking of him, has evoked.

But as he advances farther into the room; as she hears his footsteps, substantial and real; as the fire, giving one sudden up-leap, as if it, too, were astonied, plays upon his face — she realizes that it is indeed Anthony! But what, in Heaven's name, is he doing here? Has he lost his wits? And is this the brave, gay bridegroom that she has been imaging—this slouching man; with snow-flakes lying thickly on shoulders and hair; with miserable gray eyes sullen and sunk, and hollow, pale cheeks—that is gazing at her with such a dumb fixity?

She has sprung to her feet, now that the spell of the unknown and the supernatural no longer binds her; and, retreating a step or two, stands grasping convulsively the back of a chair to steady herself. In utter dumbness they stand staring at each other for a hundred pulse-beats.

Joan could not speak if you were to promise her a kingdom for each word! But, though she cannot speak, she stretches out her trembling right hand, and, with a wordless gesture, motions to the door, bidding him depart.

"What!" he says, in a hoarse whisper; "you will not speak to me! you wave me silently away, as if I were a too importunate beggar!"

His words seemed to give her back, in some degree, the power of speech.

"What is this?" she says, in a low, uncertain voice, full of horror and pain; "have you lost your wits? What brings you here?"

"What brings me here?" he repeats, slowly, putting his hand to his head with a dazed gesture. "I—I—do not know! —I had no thought of coming! They told me that you were all alone here—all alone! but I did not mean to come! My only thought was to get away from the sound of those fiddles!—they were driv-

ing me mad as fast as they could! I am not mad now, though you look at me as if I were—I am as sane as you are. My only thought was to get away into the good, cold outside air, and once there, my feet of their own accord, without my will, carried me along the old path they know so well — the old path, over the fields, through the garden by the sundial —and—and—I am here."

His words come slowly, draggingly, with many a pause and gap between, as the words of one that speaks, scarcely knowing what he says.

Again there is silence; and still they two stand gazing blankly across the red fire-glow into the agony of each other's eyes. After a while Anthony speaks in a vibrating, rough voice:

"Joan!" he says, "you set up a barrier between us—an imaginary one that a breath could blow away!—and I—I have set up a real one, such as in all our lives neither you nor I will ever be able to overleap!"

She answers nothing. Before her blue eyes there has come a dimness. In her brain there is an odd, noisy whirl and jumble. She hears his speech indeed, sounding strange and muffled, but she can give him back none.

"Do you ask why I did it?" he goes on, in a distincter, louder tone. "You do not know why? Well, then" (with a wild laugh), "we are equal, for, as I live, neither do I! When you sent me away, why did I go?—why did I go?" (in a tone of the most poignant self-reproach). "I should have clung about your knees—I should have tormented you with my importunities—I should never have let you out of my arms—till I had wrung from you that 'yes' that would have been the salvation of us both! Well, when you sent me away, I fell almost immediately into her company. The God above us knows that I did not seek it—that it was thrust upon me!—into her familiar, intimate society! You know the old story; you know the sort of power that she always had over me—the domination over all that is base in me — Heaven knows there is enough!—before I well knew it I had drifted into *this!*" (his voice sinking to a whisper of angry despair, while he brings his clinched hand heavily down on the table). "Honor, that is godfather to half the dishonorable actions in the world, had manacled me for life, had made a liar and a traitor of me!" He has thrown himself into a chair, and, flinging his arms down upon the table, has sunk his head upon them—the sunshiny brown head that a few minutes ago she had been picturing to herself as held so gayly and proudly aloft. After a while he looks up again. "Joan!" he says, with a sort of hard, dry sob in his voice—"Joan, tell me at least—I think I shall bear my life better if you will—tell me that at any rate you would never have relented—that if I had waited, waited, waited for years, you would always have held out against me! If you have one grain of mercy in you, tell me that you would always have been obdurate! — whether it is true or false, tell me so."

Still she is silent. The dimness is, indeed, clearing away from before her eyes, and objects begin to reassume their true tints and steady shapes, but her throat still feels choked, and her lips, though they move, give out no articulate sound.

"What! not a word?" he says hoarsely. "Joan—*my* Joan that was—that *is* —that *is*—God help me! that always will be! Have not you one sweet word for me? you that had so many! Sweet or bitter, give me one! do not murder me with this silence!"

Then at length with immeasurable difficulty she speaks.

"I have one word for you—only one —*go!* I have no other!"

"I will not go!" he cries, insanely. "What security have I that, after to-night, I shall ever look upon your face again? With your good-will I know I never shall; if there is any corner of the earth

which you can hide yourself from me you will. Do not I know you well enough for that? They tell me that you are going away into a new slavery to-morrow. Joan—poor Joan! are you always—*always* to be a slave?"

He has risen to his feet again. Scalding tears are in his eyes; and his face, young, straight-featured, and comely as it is, looks old and gray and unsightly. He has advanced nearer to her, and in his madness is stretching out his arms toward her. She does not fly or shrink from him. On the contrary, she makes two steps toward him. Her feet feel unsteady and insecure, as though they could scarcely upbear the weight of her light body, but yet she steps toward him, and, as she so steps, his arms drop to his sides. There is that in her eye and her look which makes his frenzy quail and die.

"Anthony," she says, laying her cold small hand on his coat-sleeve, and speaking in a voice which, though very low, does not tremble, "is this the love that was to raise you to my level? This, that, after having forgotten me in a month, now tries to do me the one last injury in its power, by blasting my good name?" Under her light touch, under the command of her pure eyes, he stands as if turned to stone. He neither stirs nor speaks. "Go," she says, pointing with pale austerity to the door, "at once—this moment—and I will ask God to wipe this half-hour clean out of my memory; of his clemency to let me forget that the man I thought such a stainless gentleman could be for one hour a coward and a traitor!" Under her words he starts and winces as if one had touched him with a hot iron, but still her eyes keep him dumb. "What speech can there be any more between us two in this world?" she goes on in the same steadfast, low key; "whether we are together in this narrow room, or whether all the great earth spreads between us, we are equally forever — forever asunder. What is there left for us to do but to fight out our lives bravely and truly apart? Perhaps" (faltering a little)—"perhaps when the fight is over — when this world is done with and put by; when the next—"

"And if there is no next," he says, heavily, breaking into her speech; "all the analogies of Nature, all the later secrets she has given up, point one way! they all say, 'There is no other! for you there is no other! make the most of this!'"

"And if there is no other," she cries, brokenly, lifting her clasped hands and streaming eyes—"perhaps it is so. I know not! it is all thick blackness round me!—but if there *is* no other, if this narrow bridge of life is all the space that we are given in which to tread down the brute within us, to take the satyr by the throat and lift up the God! then all the more—a hundred times the more—have we no time to lose! let us begin at once—at once!" Her voice, so tremulous and shaken at first, has grown clear and strong, and into her eyes there has come a bright and saintly shining. "Go!" she says, still pointing with slight lifted arm to the door, which is to shut him forever from her sight; "you have made me a very sorrowful woman; you have made the taste of life bitter to me; do not add this crowning grief — this sorrow for which there is no physic—the sorrow of thinking that I, whose one wish, as God lives, was to raise you to the better life, —to make you worthier and nobler—that I should be made the tool with which you work your degradation! Go!"

And without another word he goes.

# *PART II.*

## CHAPTER I.

THE world — the old world or the young world—whichever way you choose to look at it, is nine hundred and twelve days older than it was. It is two years and a half since we bade good-by to Joan. Since then there have been three sets of east winds and daffodils; three of roses and hay-cocks; two of flame-colored woods, and Michaelmas geese; and two of snow-feathers and iron frosts. The world has swung along at its old jog-trot. Great people have died in small numbers, and small people in great numbers. People have been wed, unwed, and half wed. Tears have flowed, whose united volume would make a river that would outswell the Mississippi; and laughs have echoed, whose combined noise would drown the sound of man's loudest cannon, or God's best thunder-storm. And Joan Dering is still alive. She has contributed a few of the tears to the great river, and a few of the laughs to the great noise.

When we left her it was February, when we find her again it is August. When we left her it was dark, when we find her it is light. When we left her it was night, when we find her it is day—an August day in the afternoon. But there is no sultry August sun-blaze. The whole air is occupied by a fine, small rain, soft as butter, thick as mist, that, while it seems to caress you, soaks you to the skin. And so, though it is a half-holiday, the Smith Deloraine school-room is as inhabited as if it were mid-lesson time.

By the open window, almost reached by the rain-plash, sits a little boy with heavy volume supported on small crossed knees, bent head, and hair falling into his studious eyes; evidently buried, full five fathom deep, in the quarto page before him. Another boy, a size larger, and apparently of a bent less intellectual than practical, has stealthily climbed upon a chair, and, by the aid of a grammar and a door ajar, is cautiously arranging a booby-trap for the reception of his sister Faustine, who left the room about ten minutes ago, and may shortly be expected to return.

Did his instructress see him she would undoubtedly put a stop to his exertions; but, as it happens, her back is turned toward him; and, moreover, for the moment, her thoughts are far enough from little boys. She is sitting at the table with brown head leaned on white hand, while before her lies open an old pocket-book, at one entry in which her blue eyes are fixedly staring. For the moment, she sees neither pupils, nor green baize, nor small rain, nor big maps.

Her meditations are broken in upon by the voice of the little student, who suddenly lifts up his stooped head, his intently wrinkled forehead, and his little shrill voice.

"Miss Dering, why was not Queen Caroline a good woman? what did she do? did she cut off people's heads?"

"Not that I ever heard of, Monty!" replies Joan, laughing a little, and evading an explanation of the nature of the in-

iquities perpetrated by George IV.'s consort.

Again there is silence; broken this time by the opening of the door (innocuously, for the booby-trap has missed fire), to admit a little girl, Joan's eldest and last disciple—a well-to-do pink miss of ten.

"Miss Dering, mamma sends her love to you, and will you mind dining with them to-night?—they will be thirteen if you do not. Why do they mind being thirteen? I asked mamma, and she said it was because of Judas Iscariot!—what has Judas Iscariot to say to it?"

"Going to dine!" cries Rupert, with a long-drawn sigh of bitter envy; "how I wish I was going to dine! what a lot I'd eat! I'd have twice of everything!"

"What will you wear, Miss Dering?" asks Faustine, gravely; "but you have so few dresses!—do not you wish that you had as many as mamma? Mills says that mamma might go on for a month without stopping, putting on two fresh dresses every day!"

Joan smiles good-humoredly.

"If I had a hundred, I could not wear more than one at a time, could I?"

"Papa and mamma quarreled this morning!" says Rupert, triumphantly, in the tone of a discoverer; "they often quarrel! Do husbands and wives always quarrel, Miss Dering?"

"If you had a husband, do you think that you would quarrel with him?" asks Faustine, leaning her elbows on the table, and shaking her flax fleece.

"I wonder will you ever have a husband?" asks Rupert, staring affectionately, with round, unblinking eyes, into Joan's face, as if to gauge her probabilities of being wed.

She laughs a little.

"I think it is extremely unlikely."

"We will watch you as you go in to dinner, from the stairs," says Faustine; "the maids always do; you will come last of all, will not you?"

"Yes, last of all."

"Miss Dering," cries Monty, looking up again from his book with flushed cheeks and excited, shining eyes, in utter unconsciousness of there having been any intervening conversation between his last query and his present one, "would not she say her prayers?"

"Would not who?" asks Joan, who has forgotten the majesty of Brunswick.

"I never heard of anybody but old Daddy Longlegs that would not."

The door again opens, and a tall, pale lady, with a pretty, fresh gown and a pretty, faded face, chronically discontent, trails slowly in.

"Has Faustine asked you?" she says, advancing to the table. "I thought I would make sure by coming myself; children never give messages correctly."

"You wish me to dine?" says Joan, in a pleasant, ready voice. "I shall be very glad."

"We shall be thirteen if you do not!" says the other, in a depressed tone. "Mr. Smith Deloraine has invited a cousin of his at the last moment; so the whole party is disarranged, and the table has to be laid again."

"Yes?"

"His name is Smith" (in a voice of languid disapprobation). "I have only seen him once! he is a little horror—a Yahoo—and I am afraid that I shall have to send you in with him; but you need not speak to him; he is beyond the pale of conversation, and is so overwhelmed with *mauvaise honte*, that it is a barbarity to address him!"

"Then I may enjoy my dinner in peace," says Joan, laughing, "which is better than any conversation—is not it, Rupert?"

"By-the-by, you ought to know him" (with a slight quickening of speech and animation of look); "he is the man who bought Dering!"

"The man who bought Dering?" repeats Joan, starting, while a painful, hot flush runs hastily to her cheeks. "Oh!—and—" (with an accent of unavoidable

repugnance)—"and I must go in to dinner with him?" Then, in a moment recovering herself: "I am talking nonsense! Of course I—I—have no objection!—I—I—do not mind."

"It is very disgusting! I quite agree with you," says Mrs. Smith Deloraine, putting her head on one side and speaking in a very piano tone, while she felicitously ignores the fact that not so very long ago the Smith Deloraines' family tree rose triumphant from Magenta dye—"the way in which all the old historic places are falling into the hands of these tinkers and tailors *is* very disgusting. But *que voulez-vous?* here they are! and we must make the best of them."

"Every dog has his day, I suppose," rejoins Joan, trying to smile, and to wink away the two large tears that have rushed to her eyes; "but the ex-dogs feel a little bitterly toward the reigning ones!"

"Naturally. Dear me!" (sighing heavily), "how it rains! Life is very up-hill on this kind of days!" and so trails depressedly away again, still sighing and lamenting that the table has to be fresh laid.

When she is gone Joan sinks back again deeper than ever into her reflections. Her eyes wander away through the window and the Scotch mist to the wet horizon, in the direction where twelve miles away she knows that the walls of Dering Castle are grayly rising. Her ears take no note of the little persistent child-voices round her, nor of the fire of reiterated, eager questions to which they are exposed.

"What is a Yahoo, Miss Dering?"

"Is papa a Yahoo?"

"Of course, if his cousin is, he is."

"Is mamma a Yahoo?"

"Are you a Yahoo?"

"Are we Yahoos?"

"Are Yahoos pretty?"

By-and-by she is rid of the children too.

They go off to a distant, unfurnished room, where—there being nothing to break—nothing but high ceiling, unpapered walls, and bare floor—they are allowed to vent their ebullient spirits in a safe vacancy. They carry off even the reluctant Montacute, who would far rather have remained behind, with his quarto, to investigate still further the ill-doings of Caroline of Brunswick; but in vain. He is swept away by his boisterous brother and sister.

## CHAPTER II.

JOAN is dressed to the last pin and button. She has taken her farewell look at her own image—that look of temperate approval which a very pretty woman must, in common honesty, award to her own reflection. She would admire such a face were it on any one else's body. Why not because it is on her own? Joan knows quite as well as you could tell her that she is pretty; but it is such an old piece of news that it brings no great elation or complacency with it. As long as she can remember, she has always been pretty, and people have told her so. It is not they whose beauty has grown up with them from babyhood to whom it is a perilous gift; it is those who have jumped from an ugly, unpromising girlhood into a handsome womanhood, whose heads are mostly turned by their own charms.

Joan is dressed in black. She usually is. It is economic and unremarkable, and all colors go with it. Her gown is a veteran—a scarred and war-worn veteran; one of her original Dering stock; one of those which the Misses Moberley copied in cheap materials and gaudy colors, and garbled in the copying. It has been modified so as to tally fairly with the now mode; and having been originally of the best French cut, and the richest, softest Lyons silk, it is still even in its decline eminently respectable. A little kerchief of cobweb muslin and ancient yellowy lace—also a relic of her gene

prosperity, for she is hardly likely to buy old Flemish point nowadays—is

"Over her decent shoulders drawn."

In her charming head, sleek and smooth as a robin's, there is no ornament but a little careless bunch of field poppies, bluettes, and ripe corn, that the children brought her, and which she wears rather to avoid hurting their feelings than from any more personal motive. She is quite ready now, and has reëntered the school-room.

"You have been only twenty minutes dressing!" cries Faustine, looking from the clock to Joan, with round, astonished eyes; "mamma never takes less than an hour!"

"Mind you come and see us when we are in bed," says Rupert, impressively, "and tell us how many things you had for dinner!"

"You have only three buttons on your gloves!" says Faustine, taking hold of one of them, and eying it with a rather contemptuous look; "mamma has six; when I am a grown-up lady I mean to have twelve!"

Joan is in the drawing-room now. She has run rather hastily down-stairs, under the impression that she is late; but, on entering, she finds that only ten people besides herself are yet assembled —that three must therefore be still missing. The host and hostess are both standing on the Persian hearth-rug, though no fire lures them thither. Mrs. Smith Deloraine is a good head taller than her husband. That there may be no mistake about it, she is fond of standing beside him, and drawing up her slight, tall figure to its last inch, so as to display to the world this advantage. Mr. Smith Deloraine is indeed neither so long nor so smart as his name.

Almost every trade and profession writes its name more or less plainly on its votaries; but none does this so distinctly as commerce. Commerce is written all over Mr. Smith Deloraine, from head to heel. He *could not* be a soldier, a sailor, a lawyer, or a clergyman. Mr. Smith Deloraine gives you the impression that, if he let himself go—if he got drunk or jocular—if he flew into a rage or made love—he would be uncommonly vulgar; but, by judiciously avoiding powerful emotions and colloquial expressions, he does very nicely.

As Joan enters, his wife is saying fretfully, "I am sure I do not know how much longer we are going to wait for *Mr. Smith Deloraine's* cousin: no one should be allowed more than ten minutes' law! it is not fair upon one's cook!"

"But, my love," suggests the host, with the deferential air of a man who has married above him, and never, even in sleep, forgets the liberty he has taken, "you forget that it is not only my cousin that has played truant—that we have not yet had the pleasure of welcoming your own relatives!"

His love looks full at him, or rather at the place on which he is standing, without apparently being able to see him; nor does she vouchsafe him the very least answer, beyond stretching out her hand to the bell to ring for dinner.

"O Miss Dering!" she cries, catching sight of Joan, "is not it unfortunate? I have just had a telegram from my cousin to say that she and her husband have missed their train and cannot be here till ten! I am so vexed! but" (sighing heavily) "it has been a day of *contre-temps!*"

It is Joan's first intimation that her employer expected any cousins; but she expresses the proper regrets. Five minutes later, they are all marching in to dinner; Joan bringing up the rear, in composed solitude. As she crosses the hall, she looks upward to send nods and becks up to the children, who, in company with half a dozen lady's-maids appraising the smart gowns, are hanging over the banisters.

Joan's position at the dinner-table is between the master of the house and a

vacant place; not a promising situation for conversational enjoyment; but Joan has no great wish to converse. Her one desire is that the empty seat should remain empty throughout dinner. Not all her self-schooling, her philosophy, her common-sense, or her Christian charity, have succeeded in making her feel that she can give anything more than the nakedest skeleton of civility to Dering's new lord. Can the ex-king willingly hobnob with the reigning one? She has already made a vivid picture of him in her mind; the triumphant plutocrat! probably large and heavily jeweled; with florid shirt-front, and boastful, familiar manners. Every five minutes which find him still absent are so much clear gain. It is true that Joan's own dinner prospect is not very lively; but that is a minor evil. She translates and commits to memory the whole of the *menu*, for Rupert's benefit. She takes quiet note of her fellow-guests, and, being healthily hungry, enjoys her food.

Soup is safely passed, and the party is in mid-fish when Joan's careless eyes are caught and fettered by the sight of a little young gentleman with a red head, and a small face on which freckles and fright strive for mastery; who is tendering stuttered apologies to the hostess, and having them received in a manner which would make a stouter heart than his quail, a wiser face than his look foolish. Is this the triumphant plutocrat—this unhappy little lad, bathed in scarlet discomfiture from top to toe, who is beginning aimlessly to ramble round the dinner-table; not seeing in his confusion that a kind-hearted footman is trying to guide him to his destined seat?

He is deposited in it at last, and, in a small and shaking voice, refuses the soup that has been recalled for him. Joan's animosity dies on the spot—replaced by an immense surprise, and a hardly inferior compassion. It would be barbarity to address him now, but by-and-by, when he is cooled, fed, and calmed, it will, perhaps, be an act of Christian charity to make some small, soothing observation to him.

For a full quarter of an hour, therefore, she leaves him entirely alone; then, when the last *entrée* is setting out on its travels, she turns her charming, kind face toward him, and, in a low, pleasant voice that would not frighten a mouse or a hare, speaks:

"You mistook the dinner-hour, I dare say? It has happened to me once or twice in my life!"

On perceiving that he is addressed, the flamingo hue again rushes over the little young gentleman, far as the eye can reach. Not daring to look her in the face, he shoots a timorous glance out of the corner of his right eye, from amid a forest of white eyelashes, and says in a hurried, low voice:

"The clocks were different; ought not I to have come in? Did it matter much?"

Joan smiles involuntarily.

"Not in the least! Why should it? Did you drive over—drive yourself?"

"Oh, dear, no!" (in the same quick, nervous voice). "I never drive, I do not know much about horses; I came in a fly!"

A pause.

"Were you ever here before?" asks Joan, perceiving that the conversation, if kept up at all, must be supported catechism-fashion—question and answer—and being perversely resolved not to let her little victim relapse again into silence.

"No, never!" (looking timidly round the table). "I know nobody, I am quite a stranger in these parts."

"And yet you belong to this neighborhood?" says Joan, interrogatively. She cannot bring herself to ask more directly after her beloved, desecrated home, and yet has a morbid longing to have it brought into the conversation.

"I suppose so" (in a not very exhilarated tone). "I have lately purchased a place about twelve miles away—a very

large place" (sighing); "perhaps you may have heard of it? Dering Castle!"

"Certainly I have heard of it," she answers, with a smile of exceeding sadness; "not only so, but I used once to live there!"

"Indeed!" (curiosity, for the moment, getting the better of *mauvaise honte*, and turning upon her for the first time a small, full face, quite as insignificant and rather more foolish than its profile).

"My name is Dering," she says in a very low voice. "I used to live there with my grandfather."

"Oh, really!" (in a tone of, if possible, increased awe). "You are a member of the late family—I had no idea!" A moment later, in a hesitating tone: "Were you—were you—much attached to the place?"

"I loved it!" she answers; her fair breast heaving under its dainty kerchief, and her blue eyes growing moist. "It would be a wonder if I did not. I spent twenty most happy years there."

"Oh, indeed!" Then, in a rather dubious voice: "It is a very fine place, of course—very fine—one of the showplaces of the county, I am told—and it has always been thrown open to the public every Friday, I hear. A very fine place for a numerous family, but do not you think that it is rather—rather large for one person?"

"Rather large!" echoes Joan, indignantly. "Surely that is a good fault in a castle!"

"The rooms are so very spacious," continues their owner, nervously; "and there are so many of them that, though I have occupied it now for three months, I can scarcely find my way about yet. I have never been used to a large house."

"No?"

There is a silence. Joan can't speak for anger and pain at the thought of this trumpery stripling walking, sole master, about the dear old halls and rich dusk chambers of them in his little caitiff heart for their nobility. Her companion is far from guessing at her emotion. He knows only that she is listening to him with interested attention; that her voice is soft and civil, and her face lovely and kind, and that he himself is not nearly so much frightened as he was. He, indeed, is the first to renew the conversation.

"Perhaps" (in a hesitating voice, and growing pink again)—"perhaps, if you were so fond of the castle, you might like to run over some day and see the improvements."

"Improvements!" cries Joan, hastily, coming out of her disagreeable reverie. "What improvements?" Then, recollecting herself, and in a calmer voice: "Have you, then, been making many improvements?"

"There is a great deal of new furniture introduced," says the young man, with a faint flash of pleasure in his pale eyes. "I suppose that the castle had not been refurnished for many years. I am no judge myself of such matters, so I was advised to put it into the hands of a local upholsterer."

"A great deal of new furniture!" repeats Joan, drawing a long breath. "Yes!—and what else?"

"All the old tapestry has been removed," continues Mr. Smith, growing almost fluent under the fostering influence of his companion's attention and evident approbation. "It was so faded, dingy, and out of repair; it has been replaced by white and gold, and mirrors in the French taste!"

"White and gold, and mirrors in the French taste!" repeats Joan, mechanically. "Yes—and what else?"

"All the windows throughout the building have been turned into sash ones, the best plate-glass instead of the old casements. No expense has been spared. I think" (with a nervous smile) "that you will say I have not been idle."

"I am sure I shall!" she answers in a very low voice, bending down her head.

Her white hands are clinched together in her lap, her face has grown pale, and her lips are pinched. Why, oh why, did she ask these questions? Why did not she remain in her old blest ignorance? Why did not she leave undisturbed in her memory the old oak panels, the harmonious dim tapestry hues, the casements opening on roses and ivy?

It is well for Joan, and perhaps also for her neighbor, though he does not think so, that at this moment Mrs. Smith Deloraine begins to gather up her loose baggage, and beckons away the ladies. Joan rises hastily. Never—never has she left a table, or a table companion, with greater readiness. As they pass through the hall Mrs. Smith Deloraine lays her hand affectionately on Joan's shoulder.

"Thank you so much!" she says, lackadaisically; "how good you were!—you drew him out wonderfully!"

"Did I?" says Joan, with a gasp and an hysterical laugh; "then I wish I had not!"

"He is a little horror!" rejoins the other, in a disgusted tone; "did not I tell you so? He has been nowhere and knows no one, and he has white eyelashes; but" (shaking her head), "for all that, he is an enormous *parti!*"

"I suppose so!" replies Joan, slowly; "he does not give one that impression."

"He is a little beggar on horseback!" cries her companion, with more energy than one could have supposed her discontented, soft voice capable of; "about a year ago he came quite unexpectedly into this colossal fortune; and now that he has it, he knows no more what to do with it than that fire-shovel; it makes one sick!"

Joan is silent; though certainly not from any disagreement with the sentiment expressed. Her heart is too full to speak. She sits down and begins to talk to one of the ladies about her work; but to all her gentle, womanly chat, there is, in her mind, a drear background of torn ivy, rent tapestry, sash-windows.

The evening wears away. Coffee is past; the men reappear. Joan's new *protégé*, on first entering the room, has aimed at her a piteous, shipwrecked look, but, seeing her palisaded round by women, his heart fails him; and he remains planted on the hearth-rug—the spot whither he had first drifted. The other men have dispersed about the room; have thrown themselves into easy-chairs; have engaged in talk. He alone still stands; afraid to sit down, afraid to stir, afraid to speak to any one; with his trembling hands folded behind his coat-tails for want of knowing where else to put them; while now and again waves of red misery rush over his whole body, as often as he thinks that any one is looking at him.

There he stands, a wretched little Crusoe, an his desert island of hearth-rug. Joan looks at him, and smiles maliciously. It is the first time in her life that the suffering of a fellow-creature has moved her to mirth. Were the case any other, she would rush helter-skelter, pell-mell to the rescue. But toward him her heart is hardened. No punishment can be too heavy for him who has mutilated the dear and reverend face of her ancient home, and set its venerable body masquerading in tawdry modern frippery; no punishment—not even that of standing, a forlorn, unrescued, social Crusoe, without man Friday, umbrella, or parrot.

It is ten o'clock now, and past; and the hostess's expected cousins are overdue. She has observed several times that they will be hungry—that they will be tired—that she wishes they would come; and has succeeded in awakening a feeling of faint expectancy in the breasts of the company generally, when, at length, the listened-for carriage-wheels are heard crunching the gravel of the drive; the hall-door bell is rung; no dogs rush out (for, alas! it is a house unblessed by dog presences); servants hasten to answer the summons, and Mrs. Smith Deloraine herself hurries out, leaving the door open behind her. There is a lull in

the talk among those who are left behind: all, however little addicted to eaves-dropping, involuntarily listening—listening to the sound of cheerful, mixed voices that has risen in the adjoining hall; voices welcoming—voices being welcomed—voices questioning, replying, ejaculating. At first they all talk at once, and you can detect no separate tones; but after a moment or two a strange woman's voice, clear, *enjouée*, rather loud, raises itself above the others.

A strange woman's!—strange she may be to the rest of the party, but is she strange to Joan? As those tones first strike her ear, her little deer-head, slightly stooped over her work, suddenly lifts itself; the hands, moving a minute ago so deft and white among her crewels, fall suddenly idle in her lap. Her eyes turn, wide and startled, toward the door. Quick, short breaths draw in and again puff out her fine nostrils. Can there be two voices in the world so miraculously alike? Can there be such a wondrous sameness in the trick of two people's laughter? Oh, if they would but come in! There is no doubt but that the first glimpse of the new-comer will disperse this painful, mad illusion!—will make her racing heart pulse with reasonable slowness again. How they dawdle! How long they are! And yet they are not long really! It is scarcely five minutes from the moment when the hall-door bell rang to that at which they enter the drawing-room—Mrs. Smith Deloraine leading her gayly-chattering cousin, and the men (for Mr. Smith Deloraine has sped solicitously out in his wife's wake) following behind them.

Before they are well over the threshold, Joan's eyes have fastened upon and taken possession of the entering forms. What new trick of Fate is this? There is no need for a second look. The first one darted, lightning-quick, has assured her, past the possibility of error, that the new-comer's face and figure are not less familiar to her than were her voice and her laugh; and that face, figure, voice, laugh, belong to none other than to Lalage Wolferstan! And if the woman be Lalage, who then is this handsome, dusty man that is stepping after her, making polite, short answers to his new host's volleyed civilities? Who is he likely to be? Who but her husband? Who but Anthony?

## CHAPTER III.

"How you dazzle one!" cries Lalage, advancing into the room, blinking her eyes, unused, after her long, dark drive, to the light; "how bright you are!—is there any one here that I know, I wonder? I hope, if there is, that he will come and claim acquaintance with me, for I can see nothing!" Then, as her sight suddenly recovers its wonted strength and clearness, she turns her quick, bold eyes round the room. In a moment they have lit upon Joan. "Miss Dering!—is it Miss Dering?—how very absurd!—Anthony, here is Miss Dering!—you do not mean to say that you do not remember Miss Dering!"

There comes no answer of any kind; at least in words. What answer is written on his face, Joan can but dimly conjecture, for her eyes refuse to lift themselves to his. She puts out a small and icy hand in the direction where she feels that he is, and is aware that it is taken for a second into one as cold; then instantly dropped.

One thing is certain; and that is, that her fingers cannot be in greater haste to get away from his than his are to get away from hers.

"How small the world is!" cries Lalage, lightly; then quickly turning, in answer to an inquiry from her hostess, to a subject that is much nearer her heart: "Famished, my dear? of course we are! do not we look it? You have kept some dinner for us, I hope—yes?—that is right!

and how soon do you think it will be ready? do beg them to make haste!"

"Certainly!" (sweeping hospitably toward the bell in one of the fifty-six long-tailed gowns of which her daughter has made exultant mention); "but surely you will like to take off your bonnet first."

"And remove a few of my layers of dust," says Lalage, laughing, and passing a fine but dusty handkerchief over her handsome, dusty cheek; "perhaps it would be more civilized!" (beginning to move toward the door, then, her eye suddenly alighting again upon Joan)—"O Miss Dering, I remember your good-nature of old, and you have not been traveling for sixteen hours; do run into the outer hall and see if I have left my hand-bag there!"

"Why will you trouble other people with your errands?" interrupts a vexed man's voice, in a tone of deep though smothered irritation; "you know that I am always ready to go on your messages! what is it you want?"

Joan has come forward readily, though with knocking knees and an ash-white face, to perform the service asked of her; but, at the sound of those tones, so well known and yet so unknown (for where is the boyish jollity, the catching mirth, that always used to echo in the old Anthony's voice?), she shrinks back again into her corner, cowers away as if to get out of sight and ear-shot.

She takes up her needle again; but her shaking fingers are unable to guide it. It is impossible to her to set one stitch. But though she is incapable of working really, an apparent absorption in her occupation will make her less likely to be addressed. They have left the room now, and she breathes more freely; Lalage still laughing, and talking emphatically and rather loudly about her own hunger, and Anthony dead—*dead* silent. It is some time before they return; not until after the longed-for and so eagerly-asked-after dinner has been done justice to. In the mean time Joan remains in the corner of the old-fashioned sofa behind the work-table; the same spot where she was when the tones of Lalage's remembered voice first smote her like a sword. Her head is down, bent over her work; all the pretty tools of her trade are spread around her. She has all the air of a persistent industry, and yet is, in effect, absolutely idle. About her goes on the hum of light talk, utterly unheard; a wave that flows round her without reaching or touching her. After a while she becomes aware that the ill-starred millionaire is seated alongside of her.

She has no smallest idea of how he came there, nor is aware that she herself by a kind but quite unconscious smile authorized him in the audacity of squeezing himself into the distant opposite sofa corner. There he now sits; having, in utter nervousness, built up a barrier of two fat cushions and a bolster between them. He has recovered the power of speech, and is employing it to tell her many new and monstrous facts about his improvements; facts which at any other time would make her soft hair stand upright on her head, but which now she does not even hear. She has indeed all the appearance of giving, by small and friendly nods here and there, assent and approbation to each fresh record of atrocity.

By-and-by the fed guests return; or rather, one of them does, the other does not at all reappear; one of them, escorted by the hostess, who has been doing them the doubtful kindness of bearing them company and watching them while they ate.

"At what time do they go to bed here?" asks Lalage, throwing herself into an easy-chair at Joan's elbow, and looking yawningly at the clock; "early, I trust? I hope they do not keep one up playing any horrid games; I hate a house where they play games!" Then, without giving time for a reply, she goes on, her quick, cool look running over Joan's *tout*

*ensemble:* "How very little changed you are! what a good digestion you must have! Do you see much alteration in me?"

Joan has lifted her eyes to her companion's face; from it they slowly travel to her figure, then back again; but slowly as her eyes travel, her answer comes more slowly still. To such a question it must needs be a lagging one. Alteration? ay, that she does. Such alteration as makes us peer nervously into our own glasses, when we meet an old friend after an interval of years. Bulk increased; delicacy decreased. A figure that has outrun, overflowed the once bounds of its voluptuous symmetry. A chin that has handsomely kept its early promise of doubling itself; carnations and lilies, once so finely distinct and separate, now running into and marring each other. A universal blurring of outline, coarsening of tint, shipwreck of grace.

"An embarrassing question!" says Lalage, looking keenly in the girl's confused face, and with a short laugh—"you cannot deny that you do; well, I should not have believed you if you had; I have worn infamously! it will soon be matter of history that I was once good-looking!" Joan is distressedly silent. To such a remark what reply is possible? "I have increased in weight three stone in the last two years," continues Lalage, looking at her own still soft and once shapely hand with an air of impartial disapprobation; "of course that is not healthy or natural at my age; the doctors tell me I should be all right again if I would walk five miles a day, and get up at six o'clock, and live on roast-mutton and gruel."

"And do not you?" (in a tone of extreme surprise).

"Hardly!" (with a shrug). "I would not do any of the three if it would insure my holding out to eighty!—why should I? If I prefer to live thirty years comfortably, with unlimited tea and sleep, and unrestricted bonbons and *entremets*, to dragging out a dwindled existence to one hundred, on toast-and-water and captain's biscuits, surely that is my look-out!"

"Undoubtedly!" says Joan, dryly.

"I have never thought a woman's life much worth having after thirty!" pursues Lalage, with a careless gravity; "or, in the case of an Englishwoman we will perhaps say five-and-thirty; by five-and-thirty the best of us has pretty well come to the end of her tether!—to lose one's looks, and be dieted too!—bah!"—(with a reckless accent)—"it would be simpler to be dead at once!" Joan shudders a little, but does not answer. "They tell me I am killing myself!" continues her companion, indifferently; "Anthony is always saying so! I tell him" (with a dry laugh) "that the wish is father to the thought!" A moment later, in a tone of much greater interest and animation: "Courage! my ostentatious yawns have at last caught my cousin's eye; I do believe we are going to bed!"

## CHAPTER IV.

USUALLY Joan is a deep sleeper. Very seldom is her pretty head vexed by one of those flighty, purposeless visitors that we call dreams. Generally she lies all night quite still, scarcely changing once her quiet posture. Very often the house-maid who comes to call her finds her with the curly lashes of her closed eyes sweeping her cheeks.

> "For she, belike, had drunken deep
> Of all the blessedness of sleep!"

But to-night she does but sparely sip that lovely draught. In wretched tossings and tumblings the lengthy hours crawl away; they that mostly pass like a pleasant flash. She lies on her right side. That is unbearable. She lies on the left. That is worse. Her cheeks are like live coals. They have lent their fever to the pillow, which has, for the whole [illegible] he cool freshness that

it had when first she laid her face upon it. Her hair cleaves damply to her forehead. Loud pulses seem ticking and hammering inside her head. The window is open, and the blind down. It keeps tapping against the sill with a teasing noise. She rises and draws it up.

A tall Lombardy poplar is lifting its high head against the sky, and the thin, tawny clouds are racing away behind it. She stands with head leaned against the window-frame, and lips apart. It is easier to breathe here. The night air is cool and plentiful, and comes in with a willing, soft rush. No angry blood can long keep up its painful high temperature under this strong fanning. She draws a deep, long breath, and lays her interlaced white hands over her heart, with a feeling of astonishment that any heart can go so quick. She had thought that the season for heart-beat was over in her life; that through all her future years, however many and long, it would always pace on at its usual even jog-trot. And now, he who alone had ever made that steadfast heart hasten its healthy pace, he alone, of all mankind, in whose arms she has ever lain, he on whose breast her many tears dropped, as they stood together on the brown gold of the sea-sands, he, her alone love, her faulty, unstable, disloyal one love, is again her house-mate, is again within reach of her unwilling eyes, of her pained, reluctant ears.

She looks out at the shadows, shaking and shifting in the gusty moonlight. Is he, too, awake now? Is his heart, too, racing at the same hard, sick gallop? Are his eyes as dry, and wide, and hopelessly wakeful? It is most unlikely. Why are they here? To what end does the Great Purpose that guides our destinies allow these two broken, dissevered lives again to intersect each other? How many hundreds of thousands of women are there in England to whom Lalage might harmlessly have been cousin! How many homes where their arrival would have quickened no pulse-beat! Why, then, must they come here, where their coming murders sleep, sets cool cheeks burning, makes a trouble in quiet veins, and wakes old, dead longings out of their frosty sleep?

The battle has to be fought all over again—the battle which she had looked upon as belonging as completely to the past as her grandfather's death, or her own heart-wrench at leaving Dering; the battle of which it has long seemed to her as if only a kind and gentle memory of its slain were left, and which now she already feels beginning to rage and noise within her. It is long indeed before Joan falls asleep; nor even then does her slumber merit the worthy name of sleep, so distressed is it by blind and futile dreams—anxious, struggling, unquiet. When first the early light (for she has left the blind up), striking on her shut eyes, half wakes her, she turns and hides all her face in the pillow, with a misty longing to keep full consciousness at bay—a vague endeavor not to examine into the nature and quality of this lump of lead that is lying on her soul. But even the dim thought of it brings, in a moment, the complete waking that she dreads. Here she is face to face in the broad new daylight with her trouble; face to face, as she has already been by candle-light, by starlight, and in darkness.

It is Sunday morning, and Joan begins it with a headache. Not a good, thorough, ceremonious headache, such as justifies staying in bed in silence and solitude, with closed shutters and banished light, but an insignificant, common one, such as hinders one in the doing of no usual duty, but puts a pin-prick into every one; such a headache as makes the eyes heavy, the nerves jarring, the temper tart; such as renders a dull noise unpleasant, and a sharp one insupportable.

It is unlucky that on such a day the children — usually not much wickeder than their neighbors—should have elected to be suddenly possessed by a devil

of teasing and tiresome naughtiness of unfunny loud fun, and excessive foolish mirth. This, indeed, does not apply to Montacute, who is, as usual, buried in a book, and only emerges from it every now and then, to put irrelevant and posing questions about the equator. Joan has never hitherto realized how very little she knows about the equator. Rupert and Faustine are seated side by side, each with a smart Bible open on their knees, ostensibly committing to memory passages of Scripture; in reality, diversifying and lightening their labors by a good deal of covert scuffling and much fatiguing, causeless, chuckled laughter. By-and-by, Rupert varies the programme by breaking out into snatches of low-lived rhyme. His small, childish voice uplifts itself, high and shrill, in the following choice ditty:

"Mr. Lobsky said to his ugly wife,
'I'm going to the river to fish for my life.'
'You nasty beast, you know you aren't,
You know you're going to *galliwarut*.'"

"Rupert!" cries Joan, lifting her aching head from her supporting hand, and speaking in a tone of irritated sharpness most unusual to her, "what do you mean? Stop, this instant!"

"James sings it!" replies Rupert, triumphantly—James is one of the footmen—"he is always singing it; he knows a great many more verses!"

"I dare say!" says Joan, tartly. "I am not James's governess; if I were, I should certainly forbid his deafening me with such a hideous song, as I now forbid you!"

Rupert looks rebellious, but does not answer verbally. He indemnifies himself, however, for this silence, and exhibits at the same time his independence of spirit, and his high courage, by repeating over a great number of times to himself in a semi-audible recitation the objectionable words, in place of those of the chapter which he is learning. His sister, Faustine, though not particularly anxious to engage in any iniquity on her own account, having before her eyes too plainly the possible penalty of forfeited Sunday-late dinner, is yet able to enjoy the safe satisfaction of egging on her brother by many pregnant looks, expressive nudges, and an affectation of extravagant merriment. Of all these phenomena, though specially aimed at her, Joan takes no manner of notice, chiefly because she feels that, if she did, she would, in the present state of her nerves, be led into the expression of a wrath so disproportionate to the offense as would forever wound her prestige in the eyes of her disciples. She feels it a little hard that Anthony, Mr. Lobsky, and her headache, should all have come on the scene at the same time. She could have coped well enough with one at a time, or perhaps even with two; but now that they face her all three abreast, she feels that they are almost too many for her. By-and-by the nudging and chuckling, the recitation and its attendant applause, wear themselves out, and come to an end. Rupert and Faustine retire to the farthest window, where they remain for some time so unnaturally quiet that Joan feels at length constrained to examine into the cause of this abnormal stillness. She finds her pupils recreating themselves with the ingenious and novel amusement of trying which can get a farthing farthest up the nose.

It is church-time at last. Joan and the children have reached the church. The sun has made Joan's head worse; and Montacute, unconscious of the pain he is inflicting, has harried her with the equator up to the church-door. Thank God, it is left on the threshold, to be taken up again, no doubt, the moment that the sermon is ended.

Faustine ahead, and sobered by the consciousness of a smart frock, a smarter hat, and superbly *crêpé* hair, walks sedately along, no longer a boisterous child; a mincing self-conscious little woman of the world. They are in church now, and

are seated in the hindermost of the half-dozen open sittings appertaining to the Smith Deloraine family. It is a little old church, whose every wall and corner are covered and crowded with monuments to, and effigies of, one family—not of the Smith Deloraines, it is hardly needful to say; since it is well known that it is not more than twenty years that they have been in a position to put up angels and willows to each other—but of a knightly, long-decayed, and now extinct race. Joan's eyes have often sought these worn memorials with a sense of sympathy and fellow-feeling for these dogs who, like her, have had their day. To-day she gives no heed to the quiet dead. Her thoughts are too hotly occupied with the living. By-and-by the clergyman and his clerk make their modest entry, which, as it happens simultaneously with that of the Smith Deloraine party, is absolutely unnoticed and swamped.

The school-children's heads turn toward the door as unanimously as if they were ripe ears of corn swept all one way by the wind. Even adult heads seem unable to keep quite straight. Here they come, with a swish, a rustle, a *frou-frou!* Lalage sweeping the dust of the aisle with a faint-colored, costly gown; her gay cold eyes roving all about the church; her red lips still parted in the laugh which she has evidently brought with her, as Montacute did the equator, to the church-door. The ladies first, then the men; the host, with his civil, smug, commercial smile; here they all are! Here among them is the millionaire, looking, if possible, smaller, redder, forlorner by daylight than he did by candle-light. He comes in with his white eyelashes cast down, awkwardly stumbling over the last lady's train. On catching sight of Joan, he takes sudden timid refuge in the pew with her and the children, where, after having noisily knocked down his umbrella, and dropped his prayer-book irrecoverably far into the pew before him, he at length subsides into a seat beside the very upright, supercilious, small figure and long, dangling legs of Miss Faustine.

Every lady present has brought her mate with her—every lady, with one exception. That exception is Lalage. Colonel Wolferstan is not here. Perhaps something has retarded him, and he may follow them. The clergyman reads the opening words of the exhortation, and every one stands up. But there are several late entries; even after the service has begun; even after the confession is reached. At each entry Joan's heart seems to turn a somersault, and a tremor runs over all her kneeling body.

"Is this he? No—this person's boots creak! this cannot be he!"

After several new alarms, when at length the First Lesson is reached, her fears begin to subside. For the moment she is safe. Not yet will her eyes be pained by the sight of him; not yet, not until luncheon-time! And when luncheon comes—when, with heart again throbbing and tumbling miserably, she enters the dining-room, neither is he here. Every one else is assembled, and beginning to eat with the whetted appetite that going to church always seems to engender.

A place is laid for him; therefore he cannot be gone away; he must still be in the house. But no one seems to miss him; no one takes the trouble to inquire after him—that is, not until luncheon is well advanced toward its conclusion; not until cold cutlets and salmon have given way to jellies and trifle.

Then, at last, in a lull of the general talk, Mrs. Smith Deloraine carelessly—as if the idea of his absence had just struck her—asks:

"Does Anthony never eat luncheon?"

"*Does not he?*" replies his wife, expressively, as she leisurely pinches the peaches to find the ripest. "Perhaps you think that he never goes to church either; I assure you that he is mostly exceedingly punctual in the performance

of both duties. What has made him quarrel with his bread-and-butter to-day, I can't guess; you had better ask him!"

"If you please 'm," says the butler, striking with polite gravity into the conversation, "Colonel Wolferstan has gone out for a long walk; he desired me to say, if he were asked for, that he did not think he should be back much before dinner-time."

"A long walk!" repeats Lalage, lifting her eyes and shrugging her large shoulders; "in this sun!—Well, *chacun à son goût! I* am ordered to walk, so I suppose he thinks that he can do it for me!" (with a sarcastic laugh). "I am sure he is very welcome to try!—he may also eat gruel and dry biscuits for me if he likes."

Joan does not go to church a second time. It is Mr. Smith Deloraine's habit to monopolize his children on Sunday afternoons; and on this Sunday Joan certainly does not quarrel with the custom. She pulls the school-room blinds half down, so as to exclude the strongest light, and yet admit all the air; and drawing a little couch up to the window, lies down upon it and heaves a long sigh of relief.

There are ahead of her three good hours of solitude, of silence, of soul-and-body-calming rest. But are there? Let no one count his chickens before they are hatched; or, if he does, at least let him make a large allowance for addled eggs. Joan has not lain on her sofa for more than twenty minutes, with eyes sometimes closed, sometimes opening with a dim pleasure on the profuse great flowers of the violet-colored clematis that is looking in at the window; on the peep of cool, pale sky and tall, still poplar-she has only just begun to feel that if she can but give it time this prescription of dumb inaction will abate and finally kill the dull pain in her brows, when there comes a knock at the door, and, before she has time either to permit or to forbid, the knocker enters—enters with the silent, light foot and the noisy gown that bespeak a woman. Joan turns her head slowly, in vexed inquiry as to who the disturber of her peace may be. It is Lalage.

"Are the children here?" she says, looking quickly round the room. "No?—that is right! I thought I saw the little monsters promenading out-of-doors, which is what gave me courage to come up. You are resting?" she goes on, advancing into the room, and shutting the door behind her. "I heard you say that you had a headache! I dare say that you do not thank me for disturbing you? Do not stir, pray! Well, of course, if you insist!"

This is a figure of speech, for Joan is very far indeed from insisting. Without more ado, or any further compunction, her visitor takes possession of Joan's couch, and, stretching her supine length comfortably upon it, crosses her feet, and arranges the pillow to her liking, while the endless yards of her ivory gown lie in confused pale waves on the carpet beside her.

"Are they likely to be away some time?" continues Lalage, still thinking of the children. "Yes?—bravo! But if they return unexpectedly, please explain to them at once that I hate children, and that I have no desire to be climbed up like a ladder, nor to be told home truths, nor asked indecent questions—the only three ways, it seems to me, that children ever have of making themselves agreeable."

"I will tell them," answers Joan, repressing a sigh, at the evidence of an intention to make a long stay, and walking across the room to get a chair for herself.

"How well you wear!" cries Lalage, following her light movements with a not ill-natured envy. "I believe it is because you are not married."

Joan smiles.

"Do you think so? And yet insurance-offices tell you that a married woman's life is worth more than a single one's."

"Pooh!" says Lalage, contemptuously; "that only proves that insurance-offices never can have been married themselves. I am convinced that I should not have gone to pieces nearly so quickly if I had remained Lalage Beauchamp."

"Are you serious?" asks Joan, forgetting her headache, and leaning forward with clasped hands and grave blue eyes fixed in distressed and earnest inquiry on her companion's indifferent face.

"Serious? of course I am!" (with a laugh). "Do you think that a woman who weighs fourteen stone is likely to be anything but serious? I think that marriage is the most colossal imposture in existence, so does Anthony. It is the one point on which we agree."

Joan is silent—a dismayed, lily-cheeked silence.

"In any other undertaking," continues Lalage, showing her handsome white teeth in an ungoverned yawn, "one is allowed a trial-trip—a preliminary canter; this, the weightiest of all, is the sole exception."

Joan has moved her eyes from her companion's face. They are again looking out of window, as they were before her solitude was broken, but they no longer take pleasure in, or even see, the clematis-blooms, the great old poplar, nor the morsel of pretty, faint sky. A wave of new pain is rolling over her soul: pain, not for herself, but for him. Is this the goal whither her renunciation has led him?

"It is a provision for old age, that is all one can say," says Lalage, with her little hard, cool laugh.

"A provision for old age!" repeats Joan, echoing each word with slow precision, and speaking in a wonder-struck tone. Quicker than the jagged lightning-flash travels, her thoughts have fled back to the opulent summer morning on which he and she had sat side by side on the warm sea-sands, mapping out a high and lovely joint life. Is this what it has come to? And if it is so, has she indeed done well and wisely by him? It is the first time that ever this sharp doubt has stung her heart.

"I dare say that if I had been an old maid I should not have liked it," continues Lalage, wiping with her little fine handkerchief from her eyes the tears the exaggerated yawning has brought into them; "but, at present, to be one is my *beau idéal* of felicity; a well-to-do old maid, with a comfortable sum in the three per cents.—not landed property—I have no opinion of landed property, all outgoings and no incomings—with a good *chef*, and not a relation in the world! I cannot imagine anything pleasanter."

"No?" (in an absent tone).

"Or a widow," says Lalage, in a key of pensive reflection, trifling with the wedding-ring, which has grown too tight for her finger. "Widows have not half a bad time of it."

Joan gives a great start. Her hands involuntarily grow clinched, and a river of angry carnation pours into her cheeks.

"*A widow?*" she says, in a strangled voice.

"An abstract widow, of course!" says Lalage, looking with a lazy entertainment at her companion's flushed face; "not poor dear old Tony's! that is *sous-entendu!* Indeed, as far as appearances go, he is much more likely to be my widower than I to be his widow! Has *he* added three stone to his weight in the last two years, pray? Does it matter at what hour of the day or night *he* gets up? Does any one wish to diet him?"

There is a silence. Joan, alarmed at and ashamed of her own manifestation of emotion, has turned her head half away, and is again looking out of the window, trying to school her turbid soul into quiet again; to draw calmness from the calm sky, and serenity from the still garden-trees.

"To be well off," says Lalage, presently, clasping her hands behind her gold head, and staring lazily up at the ceiling; "that, after all, is the Alpha and Omega

whether you are maid, wife, or widow, is a bagatelle in comparison! We are not well off. No doubt you have heard—one always hears these amiable trifles!"

"I—I—did hear a whisper," replies Joan, stammering a little.

"If it were not so unpleasant," says Lalage, while a small, dry smile curls her mouth, "it would really be rather comic! There are so few things that I have ever thought worth the trouble of hating; but ever since I can remember—ever since I could walk alone—I have always abhorred poverty and everything pertaining to it—it has been my one bugaboo. In marrying Anthony I imagined that I had so completely given it the slip; and now!" (with a pregnant shrug and expansion of the hands).

"You do not look very poor," says Joan, with an embarrassed smile, and a glance at the other's rich gown; of which a man's eye would take in only the beauty, but a woman's also the cost.

"Bah!" cries Lalage, lightly, "one must have one's *chiffons*. The poverty whose fingers come through its gloves, and its toes through its boots, is not by any means the worst!"

There is a moment's silence.

"And so you are poor?" says Joan, presently, in a subdued voice and with a long, wondering sigh. "Is it possible? The very last person with whom I could ever have connected the idea of restricted means and narrow ways, is—"

"I," interrupts Lalage, finishing her companion's sentence for her in a different way from what she herself had intended; "so every one says! I wonder why. I suppose I look expensive!"

"I suppose you do!" (in an absent voice).

"When the old gentleman died," continues Mrs. Wolferstan, in an easy, narrative tone—"it was only sixteen months after we married—I remember thinking how lucky we were to come into our kingdom so early—and indeed, for his own sake, poor old gentleman" (laughing flippantly), "one could not regret that he was removed to a world where perhaps he might be able to blow his own nose—well, as I was saying, when he died—"

"Yes?"

"It came to light, when things were looked into, that, for the last five years, he had been tranquilly living at the rate of exactly double his income—trying to live up to the house, in fact. It had always been twice too large for the property. People have no business" (in a tone of indolent indignation) "to build a palace in a kail-yard; it gives one such false impressions. I am sure, when I left the Abbey, after that first visit, that I quite carried away the idea that they were millionaires. Did not you?"

"I never thought about it!" answers Joan, quickly and coldly, flushing again with indignant pain.

"No?—well, I did. I have always" (laughing lazily) "had an eye to the main chance!".

"And Colonel Wolferstan?" asks Joan, resolutely conquering her difficulty in pronouncing his name, and speaking in a steady, low voice. "Did the blow find him quite unprepared? had he no suspicion?"

"None whatever," replies Lalage, calmly; "if he had, of course I should have had too; are not we" (smiling ironically) "one flesh? The old woman had been perfectly aware of the state of the case all along, but would never hear of any reduction of expenditure, for fear of lessening her own prestige. Did you ever hear of such selfishness? But I am not at all surprised; I say of her as Voltaire said of the prophet Habakkuk: '*Ce coquin d'Habakkuk est capable de tout!*' She is *capable de tout!*"

Joan laughs, genuinely amused for the moment; but her laugh soon dies, killed by the train of disagreeable reflections that her companion's careless speech has woke to life. Anthony poor! Anthony roughly divorced from his costly pleasures! Anthony struggling to make two

ends meet! The notion is so incongruous that for some moments she remains in a bewildered silence; trying in vain to make the idea of this new Anthony fit in, in some degree, with that of the old one. By-and-by she speaks; and this is the outcome of her meditations:

"Your moor? have you given that up?"

"Of course," replies Lalage, serenely; "have not we given everything up?—we have not yet been reduced to parting with our hair or our front teeth, like the girl in 'Les Misérables,' but that is about the only depth of destitution that we have not touched! As for the moor, I confess it cost me not a pang! I never cared for Scotland; I dislike the climate, the scenery, the life; no—to be honest, that was no great privation."

"Not to *you*, perhaps," says Joan, quickly, "but—"

"But to Anthony!" rejoins Lalage, finishing the sentence; "I dare say!" (indifferently)—"I never asked him."

"And his horses?" pursues Joan, with a contained eagerness; "surely he has not given up his hunting?"

"Surely he has, though!" replies the other, with a faint, playful mimicking of the tragic emphasis of her companion's tone; "I see that you cannot yet fully grasp the idea of our impecuniosity; it took me some time; but I think I have a good firm grip of it now. A couple of pair of carriage-horses—one cannot possibly do with less in London, so I told him, and he saw the justice of it—compose our whole stud; hunters as well are, of course, out of the question."

"How he must miss them!" says Joan, in a low voice, with an involuntarily compassionate inflection, addressing rather herself than her visitor.

"Of course," (placidly), "he never says anything; I dare say he will get a mount now and then!"

Joan is again stupidly silent. Pity, indignation, bewilderment, half a dozen other ingredients, go to make up a painful thought-jumble; a sort of mental resurrection-pie.

"If any person has a taste for making a martyr of himself," says Lalage, presently, in a comfortable, leisurely voice, "I am the last to prevent him! personally, I have no turn for martyrdom: I have the meanest opinion of hair shirts and lentile pottage; I should have cut but a poor figure among the early Christians; 'Eat the fat, and drink the sweet,' is, and always has been, and always shall be, my motto; but if any one else prefers to eat the thin and drink the sour, why, let him, in Heaven's name, say I!" (expanding her hands with her favorite gesture).

"But surely," cries Joan, eagerly, yet puzzled, "it can be no question of *preference*; it must be necessity, not choice!"

"So one would imagine, would not one?" replies Lalage, with a dispassionate air; "it shows how much one knows about men!"

"Of course," says Joan, hesitatingly, divided between a keen curiosity and most anxious interest on the one side, and the dread of appearing intrusive on the other—"of course, when I speak I am drawing a bow at a venture, for I know none of the circumstances of the case!"

"Do not you?" says Lalage, carelessly; "I thought everybody did; well, they are soon told!—it is just this, that if he would but consent to sell the Abbey, we should be no worse off than our neighbors: we should not be Rothschilds, of course, but we should be able to pay the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick-maker, and leave a good margin besides for our little pet sins; can you fancy any one hesitating?" A moment later, as Joan remains struck with a painful dumbness, she goes on: "Perhaps you think that he is hampered by the entail? not at all!—he and his father cut it off: he can make ducks and drakes of the estate, if he chooses; can leave it to you—to me—to a lying-in hospital, or a penitentiary—whichever he likes!"

"Sell it!" says Joan at length, in a deep and altered voice, laden with astonished distress, as, with a pang of keenest fellow-feeling for Anthony, she lives over again vividly in memory that black moment when she first heard that Dering was to come to the hammer; "but you are joking!—they have been Wolferstans of the Abbey ever since—"

"Ever since Henry VIII. turned out an abbey full of comfortable, fat monks for them," interrupts Lalage, suavely; "yes, I know. Well" (laughing), "the matter lies in a nutshell: the monks turned out for them, and now they must turn out for somebody else!—it is what one sees every day! what can be simpler?"

Joan has been looking at her companion during the last sentence; trying in vain to keep out of her eyes the wonder and repulsion that will stream into them.

"And have you succeeded?" she asks, in a rather choked voice; "is it to be sold?"

Lalage shrugs again expressively.

"Not it! he would sell me first! I am not sure that he did not tell me so" (with an amused look). Joan draws an involuntary breath of relief. "Personally I hate the place," continues Lalage, composedly; "that continual booming of the sea and sighing among the fir-tops makes me feel ready to cut my throat; and in the house I always have an unpleasant feeling of being in church; but for selling purposes it is excellent: 'An ancestral mansion situated in its own park of—how many acres?—within easy reach of three packs of hounds; two hours by rail from London; twenty minutes' drive from a station—a quarter of an hour's walk from the sea!' It describes admirably, and I made two or three telling advertisements about it which I read to Anthony; he was so angry; I never saw him in such a fury—he raged like a lion! I laughed—I could not help it—of course that made him worse, but I really could not help it!"

"It was naturally no laughing matter to him!" says Joan, slowly and dryly; casting down the eyes from which she feels that sparks of fire, hotter and brighter than an affair not in any way personal ought to call forth, are darting.

"Of course not!" replies Lalage, good-humoredly; "one never sees jokes at one's own expense; I" (beginning to laugh) "can see no humor in witticisms about fat people; I bear him no malice, though he did look as if he should enjoy murdering me, and though he did throw my advertisements into the fire!—poor old Tony!"

Poor old Tony indeed! If decorum prohibits Joan from echoing the ejaculation aloud, at least it reverberates over and over again, deep down in her heart, like a shouted name that one mountain catches from another.

"Sometimes," continues Lalage, with philosophy, "it strikes me that he must be a little touched in the head like his father. Who but a madman would sacrifice his whole life to the dry bones of a dead idea? Will you believe it, that he has set himself the task of clearing the property and paying off the mortgages?—he might just as well begin to pay off the national debt at once; and, for my part, I should not be at all surprised at his trying; and, meanwhile, what is his existence worth?—he has put down his horses, let his shooting, given up his river in Norway, and his moor in Scotland! Sometimes I am quite in spirits, he looks so woe-begone that I think he must be coming to his senses; but no—as soon as I begin my delicate little approaches, I find that he is as mulish as ever; however" (with a light-hearted laugh), "I do not at all despair! I do not disdain to take a lesson from the humble gnat, and think that by inserting my little sting at every hour of the day and night I must be ultimately successful. Do not you think so?"

"I think that there is no doubt of it!" answers Joan, with a subdued bitterness.

"We have not even the excuse of having children," goes on Lalage, dispassionately; "and, please God, we never shall! in my state of health it is most improbable!—that" (with a smile) "is the silver lining to my cloud. Fat I am, and, alas! am likely to be; but I am not likely to be a mother! I believe in compensations!—Hush! I hear the children! —'the Philistines be upon thee, Samson!' I fly!"

## CHAPTER V.

"I LIKE him!" says Faustine; says it with a decision that at once challenges and defies contradiction.

Two nights and a day have passed since the arrival of the Wolferstans. Joan's cheeks and lips and heart have had thirty-six good hours in which to recover themselves; and pretty well righted they are. At least, such is the impression that the outside gives; and, happily for all of us, none can peep inside the machine and see what tricks our wheels and springs are playing us.

Joan has borne Rupert's French, and Faustine's music—the two most trying items of the curriculum—with about as much patience as usual; and now the workmen's bell has long and loud rung twelve. The lesson-books are slammed with joyous disrespect. The children's fidgety limbs are released from their chairs, and their insatiate tongues unloosed; nor has Joan any ostensible reason for hindering them from lighting on the one theme from which she would fain have them by all means hold off, viz., Colonel Wolferstan.

"I like him!" says Faustine, with condescending emphasis; "he asked me whether I would be his sweetheart."

"That was nonsense!" says Rupert, roughly; "he has a wife already; a man cannot have a wife and a sweetheart too —can he, Miss Dering?"

"Of course not," replies Joan, gravely; but she stoops her head over her desk to hide the twitching of the corners of her mouth engendered by this *naïve* query.

"He can, though!" cries Montacute, whose thoughts have, for a wonder, kept up with the current of conversation, shaking his head wisely, and looking up with a knowing old look on his small face; "Lord Nelson had—Lady Hamilton was his sweetheart!"

"Then he had not a wife!" says Faustine, with calm confidence.—"Had he, Miss Dering?"

"But he had!" asseverates Montacute, raising his little voice in angry indignation at having his facts impugned; "and Lady Hamilton was his sweetheart!"

"She was not!" cries Rupert, to whom it is rapidly becoming a party question, speaking rudely, and beginning to bluster.—"Was she, Miss Dering?"

"You are a very naughty boy to say so, when Miss Dering says that she could not have been!" says Faustine, in a tone of pharisaical elder-sister reproof. "Ah!" (as a step is heard outside, and through the door, accidentally left ajar, a figure is seen traversing the passage)—"ah! there is Colonel Wolferstan!—we will ask him!"

"Do not, for Heaven's sake, do not!" cries Joan, in a stifled voice, half rising from her chair, and stretching out an eagerly detaining hand; but it is in vain. The children either do not hear or do not heed. They have precipitated themselves through the door, and, throwing themselves on Colonel Wolferstan, are dragging him—a reluctant victim—into the room. Faustine and Rupert are urging him with imperative small hands, and Montacute by moral pressure.

He is in the room now: though (having her back to him) she does not see him, she yet feels it; standing tall and silent by the door. Silent—for it would be useless for him as yet to attempt to speak, such is the Babel of loud little voices that uplifts itself round him. At first it is impossible to detect any separate

articulate sound, in the vague hubbub; but, after a moment or two, these three questions, each volleyed simultaneously by a different mouth, assail the listener's ear:

"Colonel Wolferstan, was not Lady Hamilton Lord Nelson's sweetheart?"

"Is not it naughty of Monty to say so?"

"A man cannot have a wife and a sweetheart too, can he? Miss Dering says he cannot!"

"Quite impossible!" replies Wolferstan, decisively, and with prompt gravity.

The children are still pulling him in determinately. Perhaps he lends himself a little to their importunities, for he is now beside the square baize table from which Joan has risen; and their troubled eyes have met.

"It was not my fault!" he says, in a low voice of apology, speaking with an uncertain smile; "I did not mean to disturb you! I had no thought of coming in! it was their doing! they made me!"

"It—it—is of no consequence!" she says, stammering a little; "you—you are welcome—we have finished lessons."

As she speaks, she turns quickly away, and begins with trembling hands to collect the grammars, dictionaries, and copy-books, which the pupils, in their laudable eagerness to arrive at a just knowledge of the laws of morality, have forgotten and neglected. They have again seized upon their guest now, rather perhaps to his relief, and have dragged him off to the window, to show him Faustine's slim, wedded canaries, and Monty's scolding bachelor bullfinch, who are swinging aloft in gay cages. They keep him there, engaged in desultory conversation for some minutes; Montacute and Faustine each tightly clutching one of his hands, and Rupert swarming up his leg.

Joan blesses them for it. For a little while she is not aware of what is passing. There is a sort of thickness in her hearing; but, by-and-by, she is herself again. She hears Rupert's voice successfully lifted above those of his brother and sister, and apparently engaged in giving a fragmentary biography of his family.

"My papa is a very nice gentleman," he is saying, boastfully; "and he has a beautiful dog-cart; and when he dies it will be mine!"

"But you would rather have your father than the dog-cart, would not you?" suggests Wolferstan, mildly.

"Y—es" (very hesitatingly and doubtfully); "but" (with great alacrity and animation)—"but it is a beautiful dog-cart!"

"There *is* papa!" cries Faustine, pricking up her ears at the sound of distant voices; "he is talking to mamma; I dare say that they are quarreling again! —Monty, let us come and listen!"

In a moment they have all sped away on this fresh track; out of the room, along the passages, down the stairs, their six feet go flying and pattering. They take noise and ease with them — they leave silence and embarrassment behind.

Deprived of their chaperonage, the two victims, whom they have led into this snare and then left to make the best of their way out of it again, stand stupidly mute; Anthony by the window, Joan by the table. But for the shrilling of the canaries and the little hopping noise of the sleek bullfinch from perch to perch, there would be dead silence. Anthony is the first to regain the power of articulation:

"So—so—this is your kingdom!" he says, suddenly and awkwardly, snatching a hurried glance at the face from which he has, for the last two days, been averting his eyes as if it were some unpleasant sight.

"Yes, this is my kingdom!" she answers, laughing nervously.

Then there is silence again. To both it seems as if, in the whole range of language, there were nothing else left to say. In their hearts, indeed, are words enough and to spare; hundreds of sentences ready dressed to come forth, but every one of

them begins with "Do you remember?" "Have you forgotten?" and to all such utterance is forever debarred.

Their thoughts are shaking hands again in the past. Each knows that the other is back with him or her in memory, in the Moberleys' sordid room, where, with the snow coldly falling, and the wind keening outside, good and evil had fought out their fight on the battle-field of their rent hearts. But henceforth neither eyes nor lips must confess this shared knowledge.

Wolferstan has turned his back on the clematis and the birds, and is leaning against the window-shutter. His eyes are resting uncomfortably on her; after all, he must learn to look at her. A head like a bird's, a skin like cream and sweet flowers, long limbs like a racer's, and a smile like light!—what lovely or noble thing is there that has not some likeness to or kinship with her? He is thinking this with an envious, wrung heart, when the necessity for speech of some kind again strikes him with urgent force, and drives him to this utterance; an utterance not at all intended by him, or approved by his deliberate judgment:

"They are kind to you, I suppose?" he says, abruptly; "they treat you well?"

She draws a long breath, and passes her hand over her eyes as one that awakes from a trance.

"Yes," she says, with almost her usual composure, smiling quietly. "I am afraid that I cannot *poser* for an ill-used governess. I have not one single slight or insult to boast of. I can only hope that Faustine will be as slow as she can in growing up; I shudder to see how tall she is already!"

"They treat you quite like one of the family, in fact?" he says, with a bitter, short laugh. "How kind of them! Well" (with an impatient toss of his head), "we all know that it is a topsy-turvy world. When I think—when I remember—"

"hen you remember the old Dering days?" she says, with a sad tranquillity; "the days when they were plain Smiths, before they had effloresced into Deloraines; when I used to ask them to my mixum-gatherum parties, and think myself very condescending for shaking hands with him! Well" (with a slightly ironical smile), "I have my reward. Now that the tables are turned, he very seldom forgets to bid me 'good-morning,' or 'good-evening.'"

She says it with a matter-of-fact composure that her auditor is unable to emulate. Neither voice nor face is well under his command. He turns away and leans out of the window, round which the clematis-sprays and the flushing Virginia creeper make a thick and pleasant frame. Questions that he could not allow himself while he was facing her, he can put now.

"Are you happy?" he asks, in a sudden quick voice, so low that she can scarcely catch the words, which seem to be addressed rather to the birds and the flowers, that, at least, might certainly answer "yes," than to her.

She starts a little at the unexpected question, and sighs.

"Happy?" she repeats with a lingering accent of reflection; "it is a question that I never ask myself; which, I suppose, is an argument that I *am* happy—as one never asks one's self whether one is alive. I have moderate, healthy work that is not disagreeable to me, and that is quite within my powers; I have no pain of mind or body; I have no desire to hurry or retard the days as they go—quite content that they should slide on smoothly thus to the end. Yes—surely I am happy!" There is a tone of involuntary inquiry and appeal in her last words. She has certainly no intention of making him the judge of the measure of her content, and yet there is a note of indecision and questioning in her speech. He makes, however, no comment on it. He has stretched out his arm far down, to pluck from the house-wall a golden-hearted Marshal Niel rose, that, with the giant

clematis and the flaming creeper, makes a glorious trinity of colors. "And you?" she says, by-and-by, seeing that he continues silent, and speaking with an accent of quiet, grave interest.

He draws his arm in again, and it falls inertly to his side. Then he wheels back into his former position, and their sad eyes once more meet.

"Am I happy?" he says, slowly and incisively. "That is one of the questions of which one knows the answer beforehand; I have no need to add up and balance the items of my felicity!" After a pause: "You know," he continues, "that I have gone down in the world—gone down with a run; and I do not like it. I dislike it extremely!" He speaks with a boyish energy of petulance that, for the first time, recalls to her mind the old Anthony.

"So did I!" she answers, gravely; "but one grows used to it. I think that I should hardly understand how to go uphill now!"

"You know that the Abbey is let?" he goes on, presently, casting down his eyes and speaking in a tone of sullen dejection; "it has been in our family for three centuries and a half, and it has never been let before. Do you think that that is a bitter pill to swallow? or will one grow used to that, too?"

Joan sighs.

"At least it is not sold!" she says, while her look wanders ruefully away through the open window in the direction of her own irrecoverably lost home; "at least it is yours still; but—" (hesitating a little, and speaking with an accent of diffident interest)—"was it quite—quite unavoidable? was there no help for it?"

"We might have gone on living there, if we had lived very quietly," he replies, gloomily, not raising his eyes; "if we had sent away half the servants and foregone society; but" (shaking his head) "that, of course, was a sacrifice that one could not ask of any woman!"

"I suppose not," she answers, with slow and dubious assent; but against even such assent her whole soul rises up within her in rebellious outcry.

"So it is let!" he repeats, with the same depressed intonation. "I am no longer Wolferstan of the Abbey; I am Wolferstan pure and simple—Wolferstan on his own merits, and I find" (laughing ironically) "that it makes a good deal of difference!"

A great wave of compassion rushes over her heart as she looks in his aged and sobered face, out of which the young jollity, the happy, causeless hilarity, foolish, yet beautiful, too, have forever disappeared.

"I am sorry!—oh, sorry!" she says, in a sighing whisper under her breath. Then, a moment later, raising eyes in which a steady light is burning: "And yet," she says, with a spirited look of courage and faith, "as I told you long ago, I have always thought that unbroken good luck is a doubtful boon to any one; it is what God seldom gives to his choicest ones!"

"Do you think not?" says the young man. "Then" (with a sarcastic accent) "I indeed stand higher in his esteem than I had any idea of. Do you think" (smiling bitterly) "that he has any more proofs of approbation in store for me?"

She turns away chilled and discouraged, and, sitting down hastily at the table, shades with her hands the eyes into which his harsh and scoffing words have made the salt tears spring. In a moment he has crossed the room, and is standing beside her, bending over the slight, stooped body, on which he no longer dare lay a finger—which never again dare he take into his empty arms.

"Have patience with me!" he says, in a rough and broken voice; "you know that formerly—always—even in the old time—I used to turn my worst side toward you; indeed, I have a better side, though you certainly have no reason for believing it; but, indeed, I have!"

"I have never doubted it," she answers, quietly raising her look, wet, yet confident, to his.

"At least," he says, with greater eagerness and animation than she has yet seen on his changed and saddened features—"at least I am no longer in the ranks of the drones; you were always" (smiling wistfully) "rather hard upon the drones, were not you? Well, then, I am not one any longer; I am a worker—a bungling, botching worker, it is true—but still I am one!"

"Are you?" she says, a ray of pure, bright pleasure shooting from under the darkness of her curled lashes. "I am glad!"

"You know," he says, with a sigh of relief, as one that is not used to so interested a listener, "that it is hard to learn one's alphabet when one is grown up. Well, that is just what I am doing: I am learning my A B C, like a great, overgrown dunce. No cockney that ever lived all his life within the sound of Bow Bells knew less about the management of an estate than I did, so late in the day as it is — do you know" (with a fleeting smile) "that I have struck thirty?—I have put myself to school to my own agent. No!" (seeing her questioning look), "not at Helmsley! I do not know what heights of heroism I may climb by-and-by; but as yet the wound is too raw; as yet" (writhing a little and flushing painfully) "I do not think I could make up my mind to leave cards at the Abbey, and ask permission to drive through the park."

She shudders, and makes a silent gesture of assent; and he goes on:

"You know" (smiling again rather sorrowfully)—"it seems as if all my sentences began with 'you know,' does not it? But, indeed, you do know, or at least you did, nearly all that there is to know about me. You know that I have a good deal of land in ——shire. Well, there is the scene of my labors. I am living in a little house in an out-of-the-way part of the world, where there is no society of any kind to distract me, and I am at work all day, and every day—out and about from morning to night, and when I come in, thank God, I am so tired that I fall asleep like a dog!"

He has finished, and she makes for the moment no comment. She would find it, indeed, rather difficult to do so, for the picture he has drawn of his present life, set side by side with that of his past, which is standing out so vividly and in such glorious gay colors, against the background of her memory, makes her utterance uncertain and her throat choked. After a while, however, she gets back her self-command, and speaks in an even, low voice.

"But," she says, gently, "if Mrs. Wolferstan found the dullness of the Abbey so unendurable, I do not quite see how she is bettered by the condition of things you describe?"

For a moment he looks puzzled and at sea; then he turns away his head and speaks in a formal parrot-tone, as if it were a lesson learned by rote:

"Oh, you misunderstand me; Lalage never accompanies me. It is—it is—not at all in her line. You know that she never was fond of the country; no, I am quite alone."

He says it in a matter-of-fact voice, without any affectation of pathos, but it goes to her heart more than any labored Jeremiad would have done. Alone, quite alone for all his life! whether his wife is beside or absent from him, equally quite alone. There is a silence. The bullfinch, with his head a good deal on one side, is croaking his little cheerful, hoarse song. Joan has replaced her hands above her eyes. They make a shady white penthouse, under which the eyes themselves may be as moist as they please. By-and-by he speaks.

"Do not be sorry for me," he says, in a moved tone; "indeed, I had no idea that you would be so sorry. I do very well, and every day now I shall do bet-

ter. When first the crash came" (beginning to walk up and down the room with his eyes on the floor), "coming as it did" (in a hurried low voice) "on the top of other worse losses, I thought for a time that I was going like my father" (touching his head). "These curses are sometimes hereditary; but, thank God, the cobwebs have cleared out of my brain. It was not only the *money*" (with a contemptuous accent); "I could very well have seen that go if I had had anything else to fall back upon—anything at home; but you know" (sinking his voice) "that I had nothing."

Again there is silence, a heavy-hearted silence; when, there being nothing good left to say, the only refuge is in dumbness. It is broken by the sound of the returning children's voices and feet. Here they all come! Here they are, bursting into the still room, dancing, quarreling, squealing.

"Mamma was crying," says Rupert, awed yet triumphant. "She pretended that she was only blowing her nose. Papa often makes her cry."

## CHAPTER VI.

THREE, four days have passed, and Joan and Wolferstan have not met again. The occasions on which the governess of a house and its men visitors meet are not so numerous as not to be easily avoided, when avoidance is the object on both sides. Luncheon and the drawing-room, during the short space of time that elapses between the men's issuing from dinner and bedtime, are the only neutral ground on which there is any likelihood of their coming into contact; and since the day of their meeting, Wolferstan has not appeared at luncheon, nor has Joan set foot in the drawing-room. A week ago this would have been to her but a small privation. To be found by the entering ladies meekly seated in a corner with her stitching; to be civilly nodded to by all, and fitfully talked to by some; to be the mark for the stealthy stares and small civilities of such scions of commerce or waifs of fashion as Mr. Smith Deloraine's *chef* or his wife's face attract to the house, have always seemed to Joan joys not difficult to forego. Gratitude alone, for the kind-heartedness which would fain lure her from the loneliness which she in reality so much prefers, has induced her to bear this melancholy little caricature of the pleasures of society. And now a motive stronger than gratitude is pulling the other way; fastening her, through the silent evening, to her stiff arm-chair and her school-room table. Her secession from the company is, as indeed she had foreseen, the occasion of much voluble surprise, and of many teasing questions on the part of the children.

"Mamma quite expects you really," says Faustine, with condescending reassurance. "Miss White used hardly ever to go down, mamma scarcely ever asked her; but she often asks you, does not she?"

"You will have to go down on Sunday," says Rupert, with grave exultation, leaning his elbows on the table, and grasping his red cheeks with his hands, like an ugly mediæval cherub; "you will lose your dinner if you do not. Oh, I wish it was Sunday now! we are going to play 'Consequences' in the evening; mamma says so. When I am a grown-up gentleman I shall play 'Consequences' every night."

Joan shudders. It seems, however, that the children's remonstrances are the only ones to which she is likely to be subjected. No one else appears to take any note of her absence. It passes quite without remark. Before giving it up she had held lightly her little glimpse of human society, her taste of social intercourse, but now that she has let it go she misses it. She had called it a tax and a hardship while it lasted, and now that it is gone she looks back on it with something akin

to regret. The only variety that she now has—the only ease from children's lessons, children's quarrels, children's point-blank questions, children's mighty mirth—is what is to be afforded by her own uneasy thoughts. All day long she prays, with irritated nerves and chafed temper, for the children's bedtime; and, when it is come, she wishes them back again. Their most probing questions, their most ear-piercing noises, are preferable to this silent school-room, with empty chairs stiffly set, with two candles sleepily, solemnly flaring on the square table, with even the cheerful birds asleep, preferable to the company of her own thundering heart.

Heavily, heavily the days tread past; each hour stretched and strained, undivided even by the kindly barrier of night, for sleep—worthy sleep, at least—has gone from her. Out-of-doors the sun shines bravely; the hot wind rollicks with the tree-tops; the little heaven-colored butterflies flit, and the roses redly blow. But scarcely ever now does Joan cross the house threshold, though it is summer—summer at its ripest and last. The unnatural confinement makes her flag indeed; her who has ever been greedy of the fresh clean air, who has never shrunk from God's sharpest breezes. But yet she perseveres.

We ask whatever Gods there be, not to lead us into temptation. How can we expect them to hear us if we ourselves usurp their functions and lead ourselves in? What security has she that on any day, at any moment, she may not meet him—come face to face with him in the garden-paths? Twice from her window has she seen him sauntering beneath the garden-trees; once alone, with face in dishabille, smileless and careworn; once in the possession of the children, dragged three ways at once; roughly caressed and fought over by their importunate arms and differing wills. For the last few days she

the power of reading. It is im-

o her to fix her thoughts. In the middle of a paragraph she becomes conscious that, involuntarily, her own attention has escaped her; that she has lost the thread of argument or narrative. Against her strongest resolves—in despite of her most potent efforts—she finds that she is listening—listening always—listening for a voice, a foot-fall. At any moment she may meet him on the stairs—in the passages! At any moment the children's eager hands may arrest him in passing; may again drag him over the threshold of her domain. At any moment he may again be standing by the window framed by the clematis-flowers, and looking at her with the reluctant dejection of his gray eyes.

Even if otherwise she might succeed in forgetting him for a few moments, the children would not let her: they are always talking of him; bringing her snatches of his speech, analyzing his features, wrangling over their places in his esteem, and over his superiority in beauty and general attractiveness to their father, and their other standards of male excellence. A dull excitement, pleasureless and remorseful, burns, with fire ever alight, in pulse and vein; an excitement that slays appetite and wastes flesh, and against which common-sense and conscience level their arms in vain.

It is Saturday now; a sultry, leaden-colored Saturday; and lessons are drawing toward a close. To-day it seems to her that the function has been unusually trying. Whether the fault lies in the irritability of her own temper which makes her sway both less just and more slack than is its wont, or in her disciples' own innate depravity, the fact remains. Rupert has been very naughty, and has been discovered poking up with a long sharp stick, secreted for the purpose, Montacute out of the depths of a chair where he was lying buried—deaf and blind to all outer sounds and sights—away with the Volscians at Corioli. And Montacute himself has been not quite so good as usual, though his wickedness, when compared

with that of his brother and sister, is of so pale a cast as hardly to merit the name. He has insisted on stopping dead short in the middle of the daily Bible reading; and of consequently bringing the whole file to a stand-still, in order to explain at great length, with flaming cheeks and indignant eyes, what the Romans would have done in a similar case.

The hour of release is now at hand. Last lines of exercises are being written, last columns of spelling learned; and Joan—her attention for the moment not claimed—is leaning back in her chair with tiredly flushed cheeks and closed eyes, when suddenly a quick knock comes at the door. Is this the answer to her fevered listening? Is this the sound that for five long days her unwilling ear has been strained to catch? In a moment she is sitting bolt upright again, with head turned, and eyes fastened on the door. She is trying to give permission to enter, but her voice trembles so much that she cannot depend upon it.

"Say 'Come in,'" she says, in a hurried whisper to Faustine; and Faustine, nothing loath, complies.

The door opens to disclose—not Anthony; why, indeed, should it be he? is anything more unlikely?—but Anthony's wife. At sight of the children she makes a face of disappointment and disgust.

"You are still in full swing?" she says, putting in her elaborate head, which is immediately followed by her body and her fine lawny gown; "I must have miscalculated; I flattered myself that I should have found these lambkins dismissed.—No, my little dears" (holding out a prohibitory hand toward Faustine, who is confidently advancing), "let me beg of you not to come any nearer. I assure you that I look much better at a distance; all fine natural objects do; believe me, I am quite real—there is no deception about me; but I have a foolish prejudice against being felt and pommeled."

Faustine stops, abashed by the unwonted snub; but Rupert calls out lustily from his desk, in his boldest, bragging voice:

"Where is Colonel Wolferstan? I like Colonel Wolferstan!"

"Do you, indeed?" replies Lalage, distrustfully eying her three opponents; "how nice for him! He has gone out fishing, but he will soon be back, and then you can pommel him as much as you please."

As she speaks, she draws the chair from which Joan has just risen (the only elbow-chair in the room) to the open window, and sinks composedly into it; having previously arranged a footstool for her feet.

"My mind is thrown on its haunches," she says, drawing a luxurious long sigh of ease; "do you know that sensation? You will not be surprised at it when I tell you that I am fresh from a *tête-à-tête* with the millionaire: I always fall a prey to these *chétif* unfinished little men: I suppose it invigorates them to look at anything so large and well-grown. I never went to a ball in my life that I was not at once beset by all the pygmies in the room. Now that I come to think of it, I have never in my life been offered affection or admiration worthy the name by anything over four feet high!"

Joan's only answer is to glance expressively toward the children, who are listening with wide ears and over-opened eyes, in that preternatural stillness assumed by them when they think that they are overtaking something not intended for them to hear. But Lalage pays no heed.

"I might be there still," she says, beginning to laugh complacently, "but for a delicate stroke of finesse; really it was an inspiration—one can call it nothing else; and you are so good-natured, I am sure you will not mind."

"Am I so good-natured?" says Joan, flushing vexedly; "you tell me so, but I assure you that I am not at all conscious of deserving the accusation."

"Oh, yes, you are," replies Lalage, lightly; "and so am I for the matter of that; but mine is perhaps of a more passive type—more of St. James's kind: 'Depart in peace; be ye warmed and fed.' I like to leave the details of the 'warming and feeding' to other people."

"But do the other people like it?" asks Joan, with an indignant inflection; cheeks still hot, and eyes sparkling.

"If they do not they must leave it alone!" replies Lalage, with airy good temper; "but, to return, I am sure you do not mind really, considering the straits I was in, and that I positively saw no other outlet; I told him" (laughing again) —"it really was very inventive of me on the spur of the moment—that I knew that you expected him to go out walking with you; I said that you liked an escort; that you were very timid and afraid of bulls; are you? I dare say that you are; I am!"

Joan does not reply; perhaps because, at the moment, she is, with look and gesture, dismissing the children; for whose young minds she thinks the present lesson in candor and veracity hardly improving.

They go reluctantly, Faustine last and most unwillingly, with slowly-dragging feet and ears pricked to the last.

"I will not deny, of course," pursues Mrs. Wolferstan, ingenuously, "that it was one word for you and two for myself; but still it was one word for you. I think it a thousand pities that you should not have more opportunities of meeting!"

"Do you?" says Joan, dryly. "You are very good, I am sure."

"You mean that I am very officious," says Lalage, philosophically; "at any rate, I only do as I would be done by. If I were free" (with a sigh and a yawn), "I should think any one a benefactor who manœuvred a country walk with a million and a half of money for me; but" (sighing) "no one ever did!"

"And I hope that no one ever will for ," replies Joan, laughing shortly, and trying to get the better of her irritation; "I really am not worthy of these golden opportunities."

"I have had my head in the noose," says Lalage, shrewdly, shaking her head; "*you* have not. Take my word for it, that far the most tolerable marriages—it is a detestable institution at best—but far the most tolerable are those in which there can be no talk of high *falutin*, in which nothing is expected of you; there is nothing in the world so fatiguing as to be called upon in every-day life for high-flying sentiments and emotions that you have not got, and could not get for love or money; it is the one thing that makes me feel shy and sneaky." She pauses, out of breath, and Joan maintains her attitude of silent listening. "I never shall forget," resumes Mrs. Wolferstan, presently, with a smile of amusement, "how embarrassed I felt when, shortly after we married, Anthony came to me one day with a very long face, and suggested that we should try to be all in all to each other. He did not pretend" (laughing) "that it would be easy; but he was anxious that we should make the experiment. It takes a good deal to put me out of countenance, but I was then. I laughed in his face—I really did, out of sheer nervousness."

Joan has turned aside, and affects to be occupied in adjusting the canaries' groundsel.

"I should think that he did not repeat the experiment," she says in a very low voice, and with quivering lips.

"Not he!" replies Lalage, carelessly; "he has far too much *savoir vivre;* and besides, he does not like being laughed at. You might laugh Anthony out of anything—out of a belief in his own identity!"

She has risen as she speaks, and is walking toward the door.

"Well, *au revoir!*" she says, gayly. "I have told him to meet you at the garden-gate; he has gone to fetch his goloshes" (making a face). "Keep him

waiting as long as you like! What does it matter?—a million and a half of money will not be kept waiting often through life, you may depend."

With a shrug she disappears.

A quarter of an hour later, Joan is walking slowly down one of the park drives — around her her squad of disciples; beside her the escort so ingeniously foisted upon her; and ahead of her three joyful large dogs, who, their lives being chiefly spent in the retirement of a kennel, have manifested such a robust mirth at the prospect of a temporary release, as has almost defeated their own object and balked all efforts to set them free. They are galloping ahead now, in such spirits as does one good to see, sniffing, slobbering, offering each other mysterious insults.

Desperately sad as is Joan's heart, she cannot refrain from laughing at the sight of Mr. Smith nervously fencing them off with small, tightly-furled umbrella, and crying, "Down! down!" in timid imperative; while the dogs, misled by his gestures, take them for a challenge to play, and gladly accept them as such.

"They are not muzzled!" he says, eying them distrustfully; "are you aware of that? Do you think it safe to allow them to go unmuzzled during this hot weather?"

Joan is saved the trouble of an answer, by Monty, who, having been a prey all the morning to an arithmetical whining, now breaks in with his usual irrelevance.

"Miss Dering, there are ten feet and fifty toes here!"

"Are there?" says Joan, startled, and looking expectantly up to heaven, and round about the landscape. "Where?"

"*I* mean, that we have them," he answers, looking very eager. "Yours, two; Rupert's, four; Faustine's, six; Mr. Smith's, eight; and mine, ten; and then your toes, ten; Rupert's, twenty; Faustine's, thirty; Mr. Smith's, forty; and mine, fifty!"

"Say it again, Monty!" cries Rupert, in shrill delight. "Yours, two; Miss Dering's, four," etc., etc.

How long this repetition continues Joan is hardly aware. She would not be sorry were it to be maintained during the whole walk, as it makes a cover for her own abstraction, throws a shield of protection over her thoughts, which, bitter as they were before, have gained a greatly deeper tinge of bitterness since her talk with Lalage. Ere long, however, she is regretfully aware that the topic of the numerical strength of the company's toes has lost its interest; is aware also that Mr. Smith is addressing her in tones of diffident cheerfulness.

"I am very fond of ladies' society," he is saying with an accent of shy confidence; "no doubt you have perceived it by my manner; I have always much preferred it to that of my own sex; I have never had much in common with them; I am no sportsman!"

"No?" says Joan, rousing herself; "then I am afraid" (glancing in the direction of her old home, and smiling rather sadly) "that the Dering covers are wasted upon you!"

"Quite so," he replies, readily; "it is a reflection that I myself have often made; I have never had any turn for field-sports, or athletic exercises, and I am afraid" (glancing with timid appeal at his companion's face) "that it is rather late in life to begin now; is not it?—though of course" (sighing profoundly) "I am aware how desirable it would be in my position."

Joan is heavily silent. A sense of Fate's irony, of life's crookedness, is grasping her heart and pressing upon her spirits. On the one hand, this puny weakling, weighed to earth by the sense of his own good things; oppressed by the consciousness of the thorough-bred horses he is afraid to ride; of the pheasants he is afraid to shoot; of the rivers he cannot fish; and the acres he cannot walk over: on the other hand, Anthony

"I am sure that I have no desire to evade the responsibilities that my position entails," continues the millionaire, presently, in a dispirited voice, switching with his little umbrella at the ragwort heads, "and I hope in time to become more reconciled to a residence in the country; but, as far as pleasure goes, I cannot help thinking that the advantages of a landed proprietor are a good deal overrated!"

They have left the carriage-drive, and have been sauntering with the languor of August upon them across the park, to where a belt of full-foliaged trees is throwing its comfortable broad shadow on the long bracken and the hot, short grass. Joan has sat down, and the others have grouped themselves round her; man, children, dogs. Joan herself is sitting passive and inert; her indifferent eyes fixed on the level landscape about her—it is flat as a Dutch cheese—and on the lanky chimneys, that, volleying dirty smoke, stand along the line of the horizon. But the children's active minds can be content with no such quiescence. The seat they have chosen is beneath a wild-cherry tree; and Faustine is collecting the little cade cherries, vinegar-sour, and the stones picked clean by the birds; and is, with precocious interest, casting her own matrimonial horoscope with them:

"Soldier,
Sailor,
Tinker,
Tailor,
Gentleman,
Apothecary,
Ploughboy,
Thief!"

Displeased with the issue which is invariably "apothecary," she further consults the oracle as to what manner of equipage will be likely to be hers in after-life:

"Big carriage,
Little carriage,
Dung-cart,
Wheelbarrow!"

But as the answer to this query is hardly more satisfactory than the other, no efforts being able to induce it to be other than "dung-cart," she throws the stones away in a pet.

"It is nonsense!" she cries, angrily; "a rich lady could not marry an apothecary, and drive in a dung-cart! it is a stupid game!"

"Let us try Miss Dering," cries Rupert, noisily, stretching out his hand to make a fresh collection. The incantation begins again:

"Soldier,
Sailor,
Tinker,
Tailor!"

They have all gathered round to watch the result. The children are laying their blond heads together. Even Mr. Smith and the dogs have advanced somewhat nearer to the centre of interest. It looks a sociable little encampment in the woodland gloom; and so it seems to a passer-by, who is taking a short cut through the coppice, from the river at the back to the house in front; a passer-by with a fishing-rod, a twine of ingenious gaudy flies round his hat, and a pair of handsome, envious eyes.

"Colonel Wolferstan!" cries Rupert, catching sight of him, jumping up and running to meet him, "we are playing 'Soldier, sailor'—it is such fun! Miss Dering is to marry a thief and have a big carriage: it has come so three times! Faustine has only an apothecary and a dung-cart: she is so cross!"

## CHAPTER VII.

Day is over now, and Night has taken back the reins into her ebon-colored hands, though, indeed, in the fair tinting of a summer night, there is not much kinship with that hue in which we have painted our bogy, the devil, and our enemy, death.

The children are in bed and asleep; Joan visited them a while ago, and, with hand shading the candle from their shut eyes, marveled inwardly whether these silent, flushed cherubs could be indeed the same as the three wakeful little demons who, but yesterday, thrust halfpence up each other's noses, and probed her with indelicate questions as to the amount of her income, and her matrimonial probabilities. She has now gone back to her domain, and is sitting there in the dark, alone and idle. She has thrown herself on the floor beside the open window, and with arms laid on the sill, and head resting upon them, couches there in utter stillness. Were even the candles alight—could even they see her—she would be ashamed to adopt such a stricken attitude; but they are out. There is nothing but the comfortable darkness that tells no tales, and is surprised at nothing.

Down-stairs they are dancing—dancing to a piano in the hall. Faintly, but yet clearly, the sounds of the oft-repeated valse come merrily stealing through the shut doors and along the passages. Joan does not even lift her heavy head to listen. What good news or heart-lightening could any air bring her? An utter discouragement of soul is pressing her to the earth; pressing down and slaying the gentle valor of her usually steady spirit. What is this ugly, chill doubt that, five days ago, began to whisper its sickly message in her ear, and is now calling and shrieking all day long—all night long—out loud in her heart? Has she indeed done well by him? Has she indeed been to him the benefactress that, for the last two years and a half, she has so complacently called herself? Was it well done—and who but she has done it? who but she?—to thrust him into the arms of this woman; under the icy breath of whose cold little laugh all his faint struggle upward, all his hesitating aspirations after the spiritual and the ideal, wither, perished and death-frozen; under whose fostering care the earthy and the animal in him will wax to as overgrown a bulk as that of noisome snails and newts, in a dark, dank place? Is not even her own smirched name but a light thing in comparison with the sensual, smirched soul with which she herself has thrown him into daily—hourly—life-long contact?

She presses her forehead harder still down upon her small wrists, until the strong pressure is painful, and pinches her lips tight together, to keep in the paincry that seems as if it must issue from them. In this universal uprooting of belief, this ominous trembling and shuddering of the very foundations of her being, a profound distrust of even the purity of her own motives fiercely assails her. Was it wholly and solely for his sake that she, with so obstinate a roughness, thrust him away from her? Was not there mixed with it a morbid pride on her own account—a morbid pride that, because it could not give all, would give nothing? And now, and now, though she sees his wound gaping wide and bleeding always, hers must be the very last hand in all the world that can offer to stanch it.

And when he is gone and his sufferings are removed from her sight, she will know that somewehre else they are going on always, until the sharpness of pain is exchanged for the worse numbness of deterioration. Her tears have come thick and scalding, without her knowing it. They are flooding her slight arms and her little folded hands. Great, straining sobs are shaking her slender body and climbing her throat. They must even make her hearing thick, for a low tap that came at the door some moments ago has to be repeated twice before she hears it. Then indeed, in utter haste and fear, she lifts her prone head, and shakes the strands of wet hair out of her streaming eyes. Who is it that thus inopportunely seeks her?—that, in this her time of freedom, when she is utterly defenseless and off guard, cruelly intrudes himself upon her?

And in what plight is she to meet any curious face? any prying light? She will make no answer at all; and so perhaps the unwelcome visitor will conclude that the room is empty, and will go away.

So she lies quiet as any partridge in a furrow. But the knock is a third time repeated; and, since it is still unanswered, the door opens softly; a river of light streams in—a river which does not reach her, as she is at the farthest end of the room; and on that river, lit by that sudden flame, a man's tall figure—a man's inquiring face—make themselves seen.

"Is there any one here?" asks the man's voice, uncertainly. Joan makes no answer. Even had she not resolved to be mute, that voice, striking in so opportunely among her thoughts, would have made her dumb. "Is there any one here?" he repeats, rather more loudly; "surely" (straining his eyes into the gloom), "surely I see some one!"

Concealment is no longer to be hoped for. Joan has risen to her feet.

"Yes, I am here!" she answers, in a voice which she tries to believe is tolerably firm and untearful, trusting to the shortness of her sentence not to betray her.

"You are in the dark!" cries Anthony in a tone of surprise, advancing gropingly with hands outstretched before him, a pace or two nearer to her.

"So it seems!" she answers, trying to laugh.

"Were you asleep?" he asks, and, by the noise that he makes in stumbling over an intervening chair, she knows that he is still approaching her. "I knocked three times, but you did not answer!"

"Am I wanted?" cries Joan, hastily, evading his question and answering it by another; "does any one want me?"

"They are dancing!" he says, still feeling his way gingerly along by the table; helping himself on by the landmarks of Joan's desk, Monty's high chair, Faustine's work-box.

"And they want me to play for them?" (in a tone of consternation, raising frightened fingers to her own face, to feel her wet eyelashes and her hot and blistered cheeks).

"No, they do not; they want you to dance, they are all dancing; I was the only person that was not; that was why they sent me, I suppose; I would not have come" (in a tone of explanation and apology) "if they had not sent me!"

"To dance!" repeats Joan, in a voice of hurried apprehension; "oh, it is out of the question!—quite out of the question! I—I—I am not dressed!"

"Are not you?—well, of course"—(with a nervous short laugh)—"I must take your word for that!—oh, thank God! here are the matches."

There is a little scraping sound; and in a moment the candles are relit. The vanished light has leaped joyfully back again, driving before it the safe, convenient darkness. The direction of her voice has guided him very accurately.

They are standing close beside each other. There is, therefore, no longer any use in feigning. It would be labor lost, now that the disfigured face, but now so blackly veiled, has sprung into sudden clearness beneath his searching eyes. She does not even attempt to turn away or cover it with her hands. Her long arms hang listlessly down by her sides; and, in a sort of desperation, she lifts her swollen eyes with calmness to his. There is a moment's silence. Anthony's look is taking in with a shocked astonishment all the details of her appearance: the disordered hair—all the more disordered for being naturally of the sleek, unfluffy sort; the swelled eyelids, the crimsoned nostrils and cheeks, and the puckered lips. At last, and when she is beginning to feel that his scrutiny is no longer endurable, and that at any price she must free herself from it, he speaks in a low voice, which only its extreme lowness saves from the discredit of being shaky and trembling.

"You were not asleep, then?"

"No, I was awake."

There is another pause; broken again by Anthony.

"And is this the way in which you generally spend your evenings?" he asks, abruptly.

"No, that it is not!" she cries, emphatically, while a beam of eager light shoots out from the depths of her drowned eyes; "please do not go away with that idea; do not think of me as such a miserably poor creature; it is not once in a twelvemonth that such a thing happens; if you had come yesterday—if you came to-morrow—you would find me rationally occupied like any one else; oh, why"—(with an accent of impatience)—"if you must come at all—why did not you come yesterday, or to-morrow, instead of to-night?"

His eyes are wandering round the room, which looks more of a prison and less of a bower, now that its plain furniture, its globes and maps, are indicated by the little spires of light of the two composite candles, than when they were flooded by the general wash of the royal sunbeams.

"Do you spend all your life within these four walls?" he asks. "Do you never mix with *them?*"—(nodding his head in the direction whence the sound of the merry jigging company rises in muffled mirth).

"Sometimes," she answers, evasively; "it is as it happens—now and then."

"The children tell me," he says, speaking slowly, and shifting his position to one in which the fullest light the niggard candles give falls upon her, "that formerly—until quite lately—until a few days ago, in fact—you always used to make your appearance every evening in the drawing-room, after dinner."

"The children have very long tongues," she says, petulantly, with an embarrassed laugh.

"Tell me," he cries, stepping yet nearer to her, and fixing his gray eyes searchingly upon her, as if he would, in her despite, pierce through the poor mask of her troubled, disfigured face, and reach the verities of her clean soul—"tell me, is it a coincidence, or have I anything to say to it? We were always honest with each other, were not we? Is there any reason why we should not be honest still?"

A tide of carnation, even more painfully vivid than that which tears and friction have already brought there, washes over Joan's cheeks and little throat; but she lifts her head spiritedly.

"There is no honesty in the matter," she answers, with a quiet dignity; "it is a question that you have as little right to ask as I to answer!"

"Then I withdraw it," he answers, gravely; "but, all the same" (shaking his head meaningly), "it is not only asked, but answered. Well!" (turning slowly away, and beginning to walk toward the door), "you know best—you always know best; except once"—(lowering his voice and speaking quickly, yet emphatically)—"once I am very sure that you did not know best! I think that now you know it too."

He has reached the door. The handle is already turning in his fingers, when he is aware that she stands again beside him, and is lifting her charming face with a look of pure friendliness, angel-mild, to his.

"You know," she says, in a quiet, moved voice, "that it is not from any ill-will that I bear you; if I could do you any good—if I could be of any use or profit to you at any time of my life or yours—indeed, I would not spare labor or trouble to be so; but you know that I cannot—you know, as well as I do, that I cannot."

For a moment he looks at her uncertainly without answering; then, taking his resolution in both hands, speaks.

"You were always a just woman," he says, gravely; "to other people you were merciful, too; not to me. No—" (shaking his head) "I cannot say that to me you were merciful; but until now you were always just—now you are not just!"

She is no longer looking full and directly at him. She has turned away, and is standing with her head drooped a little on her chest, and her fair hands clasped.

"I do not understand you!" she says, in a low voice.

"I have done nothing," he goes on, with gathering excitement, "to deserve being shunned and ostracized—will you persist"—(speaking in a hurried, lowered voice, while a dull-red wave of shame rushes all over his face)—"will you persist in confounding me with that most unhappy madman, who, not well knowing what he did for raging pain, forced himself into your presence like a burglar one midnight, two years and a half ago? No!"—(seeing her put up her hands with a sudden gesture of prohibition and fear)—"no—do not be afraid—I know as well as you do, that it is a subject that will not bear handling; but, in God's name, put out of your head that it was *I!*—it was a most miserable madman that had taken my shape!—it was not I!"

"I know it," she answers, in a stifled and hardly audible voice; "I have always known it!"

He draws a heavy long breath, and passes his hand over his forehead, and the sweep of his smooth hair.

"But as far as *I*—I myself—the real I—am concerned—" he goes on more quietly but still with a profound and serious eagerness, "what harm, pray, have I ever done you? if we come to reckon up accounts," looking at her steadfastly and with a piteous resentment in his eyes, "as to which of us had wrought the other the most woe, I should not have much doubt, for my part, as to which would come out creditor! It will not do to hark back to old times—I know that as well as you! Do not tell me"—(in a rough voice of passionate prohibition)—"that between us and those dear days a door is inexorably shut that not all our joint strength can henceforth open ever so little. Who, better than I, knows it? one look back into your memory—that" (with a half sneer) "will not injure you—and tell me which of my sins it is that has called down upon me this galling punishment?—to be shunned by *you*—" (with an accent of indignant melancholy) "you, that were ever so tolerant of even the uncongenial and the wearisome—to be shunned by even *you!*"

She hesitates in a pained confusion; divided between the impossibility of honest speech and the cruelty of silence. She oscillates so long between the two, that he, unanswered, in his impatience speaks again.

"To which of us, pray"—he asks impetuously, and with a baffling directness—"do you think that a half-hour spent in each other's company would be dangerous?—to yourself?"—(with a gentle, ironic accent)—"well, no; I think that your passionless high soul—that your well-governed, quietly-beating heart, would come scathless out of a peril a good deal greater than that poor one!—Is it for *me* that you are afraid? well, then, that is my affair; and I tell you that I am willing—most willing—to run the risk."

She makes a gesture as though she would interrupt him; but he goes on hastily:

"Do you think that, like the Bourbons, I have learned nothing and forgotten nothing?—Have these last bitter two years and a half done absolutely nothing for me, in the way of control and discipline? Am I still an overgrown infant that is not to be trusted to play with fire, and out of whose reach must be moved every knife with which he could possibly do himself a mischief?"

"It is you that are unjust now," she says, very gently, lifting her brave blue eyes—not wet now, but lit by their own steadfast light to the restless flashing of his—"I have no distrust of you, nor have I shown any; why should I be in such haste to suspect evil where there is none? But"—(with a l[illegible], and flush-

ing faintly)—"apart from any question of you or me, you must know that since—since—well, you know since when—society has but small pleasure for me; always, always I am ill at ease, and feel as if I had no right to be there; while here"—(looking slowly round with calm, lifted face)—"when I am between these four quiet walls, my past does not trouble me; I know that my father is in God's good keeping; I have nothing but my tranquil present to occupy me."

"*Tranquil!*" he repeats, with a sarcastic accent; glancing meaningly at the cheeks which still show traces of her tears; "your tranquillity wears an odd dress!"

"It is true," she answers, with composure; "as the healthiest body ails sometimes, so, in the evenest, smoothest life, there comes sometimes a spell of soul-sickness, and"—(with a long sigh)—"I have had such a spell to-night!"

There is a pause. The door has all this time been left ajar; and through it is now heard the frow-frow of silk along the passage.

"What! burning the midnight oil still?" cries a rather loud, gay voice, as its owner, pushing open the door, stands, large and *riante*, in a gown too costly for her husband's light purse, and with shoulders heaving, as of old, perilously far-out-of-her-distanced clothes, in the aperture before them.

"*You* here, Tony?"—(with handsome eyebrows lifted, and a twinkle of amusement in her merry cold eyes)—"so *you* have found out this little Goshen too, have you? I am so sorry, because I know that now you will never be out of it; and I wanted to keep it as a little private Ebenezer of my own."

"I came with a message from Mrs. Smith Deloraine," replies Anthony, who has come forward to meet his wife, paling a little, and trying to place himself so as to shield as much as possible Joan and her still disfigured face from the mirthful keenness of his wife's look; "were not you amused?" he adds hastily. "Are you going to bed?"

"Of course I am going to bed!" she answers, with an honest and unchecked yawn. "I should have been in bed two hours ago, if I had not been misled by a Will-o'-the-wisp of supper; some one said that there was to be supper. I will never believe in omelets again; after all, there was nothing but sherry and sandwiches! imagine sitting up till one in the morning for sherry and sandwiches—is not it too humiliating? Well, good-night!"—(nodding good-humoredly; then, as she reaches the door, casting a diverted glance in the direction of her husband)—"turn him out, if he begins to bore you! he is apt to be long-winded sometimes—are not you, Tony?"

## CHAPTER VIII.

One after one, the hot days race past. The summer that begins with a gentle trot, ends with a fleet gallop. Our pleasures always pass one at full gallop, and our pains on all-fours. Would God we could know certainly that there were otherwhere a world—and that we could come at it—where the pains galloped and the pleasures crawled! Perhaps, if there were, we too should change our natures, and perversely cry "Stay" where we now say "Make haste!" and "Make haste" where we now cry "Stay!"

August is nearly run out; August, the last of Summer's three poor children. Even if you amalgamate Spring with her, she has but three. Alas! how can we help heavily sighing, we that are not fox-hunters, when we think of how many degrees of frost, and feet of snow—of how many knife-like winds and stinging rains we shall have to wade and fight through before we catch sight of another? Joan has uneasily wished the days away; and her wish, like all our foolish, unthrifty wishes for the annihilation of our

scant time, is rushing to its fulfillment. The Smith Deloraine party is on the eve of breaking up. There is only one whole day to intervene, before it melts like a snowball on a hob; before its members, brought into casual juxtaposition for a fortnight, whirl off from each other, north, south, east, west. Joan has wished for its breaking up. Therefore she must needs be now content. But, when we have our wishes in our arms, they seldom look either so large or so handsome as they did, when we saw them, magnified by distance, and mist, standing on the far-off mountain-tops of hope. Usually, we find some ugly scar on their faces, some malformation in their shape, that puts us out of humor with them. Perhaps you would say that Joan herself is looking a little out of humor with her wish, this morning, as she leans, dressed to go out, in a wide, coarse hat, and clean, scant calico gown, against the schoolroom window-frame. She is running over in her mind the incidents of the past three weeks; as once, at Helmsley, she had run over those of a somewhat similar space of time. Certainly, the disagreeables of this present period are by no means inferior, in either size or number, to that of the former one.

They are walking now in gloomy procession before her mental eye. She has had five walks with Mr. Smith: one accidental; two quasi-accidental; two ingeniously manœuvred by Lalage—walks, during which he has dwelt with ever-growing emphasis, hotter blushes, and a more ominous meaning in his pale eyes, on his own fondness for ladies' society, and the loneliness and unsuitability of Dering Castle for the occupancy of a single inmate. She shudders; much as she used to shudder at the thought of Micky Brand; then laughs. "What have I done to deserve two such admirers?"

Six times she has come suddenly face to face with Anthony, in garden, alley, or corridor. Out of those six times, twice has he passed her with lowered eyes in uneasy haste; twice have the children fallen like wolves upon him, and hindered her from hearing a tone of either his own or her voice throughout the interview; twice he has found Mr. Smith in her company, and has passed her with a silent, angry bow.

She has spent five evenings in the drawing-room; five evenings made forever hot and sore even in memory, by the consciousness that pervaded them of the existence of a jocose conspiracy among the company for throwing her into the millionaire's society: a conspiracy not so patent as to be very ill-bred, or to become apparent to the dull-witted object of it; but plain as the sun in heaven to her; and resented with an impotent wrath that helps her not at all: a conspiracy to which she can plainly see, by his sullen brows and averted eyes, that Anthony thinks her a willing party. Though she is quite alone, she puts up her hands to cover her face, as if to hide even from the bullfinch's shy, round eye the indignant flush that has stained them at this humiliating recollection. Nor are her troubles wholly in the past. There is one last, worst one still ahead of her; one, in which all the others are to culminate. Is not to-day—this last day—to be devoted to a pleasure-excursion to Dering to see the "improvements?"

"For Heaven's sake make no difficulty about coming!" Lalage has cried lamentably overnight; "the children are to be of the party, and I know it will be hell broke loose, if you are not by to put a hook in their noses, and a bridle in their jaws; and besides" (with a laugh), "you are the pivot on which the whole entertainment turns—is not she, Tony?"

And so it comes to pass that, in the fresh and early morning, Joan stands at the window, leaden-hearted, waiting to be summoned.

Monty is ill, and unable to share the general festivity. Joan has just bidden him good-by, and has left him sitting up in his small bed, with one little, feverish

arm embracing a basin, and a large Bible open at Leviticus before him.

They are off now—three carriages full.

"Do you mind sitting with your back to the horses?" cries Lalage, gayly, as she establishes herself luxuriously in her corner, with air-cushion, dust-cloak, and sunshade. "Oh, do say that you do not; when I was a girl, I always used to pretend that it made me sick. It adds very much to one's comfort in life, being able to feign a few diseases; there are very few from *angina pectoris* downward that I can't simulate at a pinch!"

They are off now. The buggy, with the host and Colonel Wolferstan, spinning on ahead; the stately barouche, with the hostess, Lalage, Joan, and the children, bowling smoothly after; and the wagonette with Mr. Smith, and the odds and ends of the party bringing up the rear.

Away they go: the bright harness throwing back the morning beams; the showy horses stepping out; Rupert perched on the box between coachman and footman, shouting out pieces of shrill information to Faustine inside, Faustine holding up her parasol and spreading the crisp circumference of her flounces all over Joan's modest calico gown. Away they go: a merry young sun, not yet potent enough to be feared, is lending his own laugh to the close-shorn harvest-fields, and the heavily-clad, green trees. Delicate morning airs are ruffling about them. Their spirits are unjaded, and their limbs untired. But this is at the beginning.

At the end of the twelve miles' drive, things are rather different. The sun has ceased to smile, and begun to smite. The refreshing gusts have laid down for their noonday sleep. The dust has found its way up their noses, and their knees are growing cramped.

It is perhaps well for Joan that her attention is distracted from pensively dwelling on the old recollections and associations that each new half-mile calls forth, by the necessity of a stringent attention to Faustine, who, having grown tired of the confinement of her position, is beginning to jump up and down tiresomely on the seat, and to swing her legs to and fro, pendulum-fashion, against Lalage's indignant shins.

"Miss Dering!" cries Rupert, from the box, in a voice of great glory and exultation, "Mitchell says that we shall see Dering Castle at the next turn. Oh, is not it fun?—Come up here, Fausty! there is plenty of room.—James, is not there plenty of room for Fausty too?" (appealing confidentially to the footman, who, indeed, is the same one from whom he has imbibed that ignoble rhyme about Mr. Lobsky, which Joan has so vainly tried to erase from his memory).

Joan's heart has sprung to her mouth; her limbs are trembling. For the moment she must leave Lalage and Faustine to fight it out as best they may. Her shrieking voice can be lifted in neither exhortation nor reprimand. Here is the turn! Already they are curving round it. In a moment the beloved, reverend home will have risen upon her aching sight.

"There it is!" cries Rupert, wildly excited, pointing with one eager, fat forefinger; "James, there it is!"

Faustine has sprung up on the seat, and her sharp look is following her brother's.

"Is that it?" she cries, in a contemptuous, hold-cheap voice; "it is not near so large as I expected!—Why, Miss Dering, you told us that it was such a beautiful house! I call it *hideous!*"

Joan has stood up too. Her blurred and misty gaze is hungrily fixed on the old, proud dwelling of her race, but she does not reply to Faustine's taunt. Is this, indeed, the lovely pile—half feudal castle, half old manorial hall—that she had challenged all other counties to beat for stateliness and comfortable beauty?—this, that time and weather had vied in

painting with sweet and sober tints; this, that, wrapping its giant ivy-cloak around it, had stood calmly bidding the little paltry years go by?

Where, then, is the ivy?—the wonder of twenty miles round—that was wont to swathe two of the stout towers, and clasped its long and lovely arms around the old house's venerable body, out of which the casement windows peeped, and the riotous roses laughed summer-long. Never, never again, save in memory's reluctant dreams, will Joan see it any more. It is cut down, root and branch; not a twig or a leaf left to show that it once was there. Bare, forlorn, and naked, the towers rise gray against the pale, hot summer sky, shorn of their three centuries' clothing; while out of the castle's disfigured face the great, new windows grin like glaring false teeth in a venerable head, flashing back in malignant mirth the sun's rays from their acres of plate-glass.

Joan sinks back again upon the seat; and, turning her head as far as possible away from her fellow-traveler's observation, fixes her brimming eyes on the rolling wheels—on the whirling dust—on anything that is not Dering. She no longer heeds—she does not even hear any more of the children's jibes and comments. All through the park as they smoothly roll beneath the familiar stag-headed oaks, and the glorious spread of the mighty beeches, she is schooling her spirit to bear the purgatory that the next few hours will bring. If this first experience is to be a sample of the rest, it will indeed be a sad day's pleasuring for her. She has hardly got the better of the lump in her throat, nor has dared to trust her voice in any utterance; when, having passed through the last gate, they draw up at the grand entrance, to find that Mr. Smith, who has taken advantage of a short cut across the park to get ahead of them, already stands waiting, small, nervous, but hospitably triumphant, to receive his guests under the lofty arched and scutcheoned door, whence the obsolete Dering lion still looks down grimly ironical.

The moment that they come to a stand-still, the host advances, hastily pushing himself before his own new mammoth footman, and, while his near-sighted eyes appear to see no one but Joan, he stretches out his hand to her, crying with tremulous gayety, "Welcome back to Dering!"

From the brisk fatness with which this greeting shoots out, it is clearly an impromptu *fait à loisir* concocted during the twelve miles of wagonette. But she to whom it is addressed is incapable of any answering thanks. Blinded by tears she stumbles silently past him into the hall; only to see that it has been new-floored with Minton tiles instead of the beloved old oak boards on which her childish feet had played and her girl's feet so often lightly danced.

"Thank Heaven we have reached the promised land at last!" cries Lalage, sweeping in with a large sigh of relief and weariness; "certainly we have not had much manna or many quails by the way! I could dispense with the manna, but O Mr. Smith! we look to you for the quails!—do you think—oh, do you think, that they are likely to be nearly roasted?"

But not even this broad hint as to the state of her appetite can induce Mr. Smith to depart from the programme laid down in his own mind—to see the improvements first, and then to luncheon. Not all Mrs. Wolferstan's heavy sighs and broad innuendoes can persuade him to alter this order of succession. If there can be any gladness in such a case Joan is glad. Since it must be, by all means let it be at once, so that by-and-by it may be over. The children, feeling that the bands of discipline are entirely relaxed, and that a general and agreeable condition of license and anarchy has set in, are already half over the house. Miles away one hears them; opening unintended

doors, riding down banisters, teasing long-suffering footmen, chivying wrathy cats. It has begun. Joan is now well into the purgatorial flames. The first door, sticky with new paint, is thrown open.

"This was the late owner's private room, I am told!—am I not right? I thought I could not do better than follow his example; so now it is mine!"

And so on through the rooms. Joan is not even able to indulge in the poor luxury of silence. It is to her judgment that all the appeals on her taste, that all the calls are made; into her ears that all the stream of complacent volubility is poured. By-and-by a sort of stupefaction comes to her aid; a dim feeling that this is all a phantasmagoria. This is not her old home, this melancholy mummer masquerading thus gaudily in its Brummagem new clothes; her old home in the richness of its sober coloring, with its ancient stately fittings, so suited to its age and character that they seem to have grown part of it, not to be severed without mutilation—with its hangings faded a little by the action of the many summer suns that have filtered through the pleasant casement-windows upon them, but mellow and harmonious as the voice with the instrument.

The feeling strengthens as she walks bewildered through the rooms in their new possessor's wake; her feet treading on fire-new carpets, the brightness of whose sprawling flowers and scrolls gets up and boxes the ears; seeing herself centupled in hundreds of Titan mirrors; her eyes aching with the monotonous miles of white paint and tons of gilding that everywhere meet them. Now and again, indeed, the sight of an old friend—a picture—a Grinling Gibbons chimney-piece—a gem by Cellini—too palpably valuable to be relegated to the lumber-room, even by the most commercial taste or the grossest intelligence—make her start and shiver as one that meets a white-sheeted ghost, but for the most part a kind of numbness comes to her aid. This is a house, and that was a house, but there seem to be no threads in her memory to tie the two ideas together. It is nearly over now. They have returned to the rooms whence they first started. Mr. Smith has been called away to give some order; Joan has sunk down on a chair by the table—both new, of course, and with gilt legs—and is leaning her burning forehead on her hands; her whole being seems to be one dull ache and bruise. She has only one idea that has any sharpness or distinctness in it, and that is, that she must not cry.

"Do not think me unfeeling," says Lalage, who has subsided into a lounge, her laugh extinguished, and her features solemnized by hunger and boredom, "but self-preservation is the first instinct of our nature, and it is really that, and nothing else, that prompts me; but"—(lowering her voice)—"do you happen to know whether this little monster bought your grandfather's cellar as well as everything else? If he did not"—(with a heavy sigh and a shrug)—"I think he is quite capable of poisoning us with cheap champagne and grocers' sherry at luncheon, and so I tell you fairly."

But at luncheon Joan's soul is draining so bitter a cup that it is of small moment to her what stamp of drink or what manner of food passes her bodily lips. They lunch in the small dining-room in which she and her grandfather used always to dine when they were alone, or had gathered only a few intimates around them. It is travestied, indeed, and harlequinized, like the rest of the house; but alas! the billows of change that have swept over it have not done their work thoroughly enough. One or two old landmarks still sadly emerge, as they say that the church-steeples of a drowned city show sometimes, on quiet summer evenings, above the whelming waves. The old familiar-shaped leather has, indeed, vanished from the walls. The portrait of Mr. Smith's mother, in cameo, Holy Family, and satin gown—a sort of Bow-

dlerized Mrs. Moberley—now hangs as a grotesque and mismatching pendant to that of her grandfather; but yet his picture is still here, so is his great-armed and high-backed chair, which seems even yet to keep his faint and ghostly spirit-shape in its embrace. Her own chair, too, Mr. Smith has, with timid insistance, begged her to resume, observing that "it will be like old times to her," and she has obeyed with a limp compliance.

During the whole time that the entertainment lasts—it appears to her very lengthy, and, indeed, Lalage's appetite is not a thing to be appeased in a hurry—she sits, feeling as if the whole thing were a caricature—a dreadful burlesque of her sacred past. She is once again at the head of this familiar board—once again there is around her a sound of gay talk and bubbling laughter; once again her lifted eyes meet the smile and look of a *vis-à-vis*. But what smile? What look? What *vis-à-vis*? It seems as if her anguished gaze could not help ever raising itself from the little *chétif* reigning king, lost and swallowed up in the embraces of his great chair, to the lofty-statured, beloved dead king on the wall above him.

Perhaps it is as well for her—though at the time it seems as if it were the last drop in an already overbrimmed cup—that the children seem resolved to contribute their little mite toward making her day's pleasuring at Dering an ineffaceable one from her memory; that Faustine appears determined to follow the example of many of the great and good of all ages, and leave this life by the door of a surfeit; and that Rupert, casting to the winds all sense of the fitness of things, is devoting his young energies to the task of moving the strange footmen from their wonted gravity, by many occult practical jokes, such as he has often tested the efficacy of upon James and William at home. Not even with the end of luncheon do Joan's trials touch their end. Fresh logs are indeed to be thrown on the purgatorial flames. It is only the scene of her endurance that is to be a little changed. What has been already done inside the house has now to be done outside.

It is now the turn for the gardens and their improvements; nor will their owner take any denial. He is obliged, indeed, willy-nilly, to take a denial in the case of Mrs. Wolferstan, who declines to be of the party, with a robust and emphatic certainty, as to her own inclinations, which precludes pressing.

"You shall tell me all about it when you come back," she says, with an ironical laugh, as soon as the host's back is turned; "as for me, I am already improved off my legs; Nature craves repose!—you do not want me to chaperone you, do you?" (turning to Joan), "no?—I thought not; I assure you that Tony is quite as efficient, and has a very good idea of effacing himself judiciously at the right moment—have not you, Tony?"

## CHAPTER IX.

The heavy, windless afternoon is wearing itself away; surely, surely, the end must be drawing nigh. It seems to Joan as if she had been walking for many hours, walking along with the same sense of unending ache, of bruised bewilderment, of recognition and non-recognition, as had marked her progress through the house. Is her memory indeed so weak that she feels as if she scarcely knew which way to turn in these familiar, unfamiliar grounds, about which she could have confidently made her way, though blindfold, three years ago? Or is it that the old landmarks have been so wholly and carefully removed and obliterated that she has a sort of blank half-feeling of never having been here before? Haltingly, and with wandering, puzzled eyes, and short, hard breaths, she has asked, one after one, for her old friends—the great

double box hedges, old, past the memory of man, and which so stoutly kept off the winter winds from the quiet path which led between them, that, in the keenest January blast, one might pace there in ease and warmth. They are gone—stubbed up—as being a harbor for slugs.

The few peacocks, too, and the flame-shaped cypresses that spired darkly heavenward along the terrace walk. Yes, they too. It is the same throughout. Where the old bowling-green once spread its shaven smoothness a fire-new range of bald and glaring vineries rises; where the stiff parterres spread their sober variety of sweetness, and the lime-alleys ran, there is now one universal blazing sameness of scentless bedding plants in scrolled and twirly beds; of fat-fleshed foliage, abominations intersected here and there by paths of gaudy-colored gravels. Where the velvet lawns stretched their centuries of finest turf, great plantations of pert new shrubs, each with a label bigger than itself, now raise their half foot of scanty verdure above the ground as they might round a new-built suburban villa. And through them all Joan has walked as one in a dream, stupidly smiling now and then; assenting, commending; Mr. Smith on her right hand, Anthony on her left, and the children everywhere.

But surely she is awake now. Surely this weather-worn, lichen-patterned wall—this old, wrought-iron gate are familiar, most familiar to her tired eyes. In a moment they have passed through the gate, and are standing in a still and ancient garden, that reminds one of nothing so much as of Mrs. Browning's "Lost Bower." Walls, partly of natural rock, all overgrown, overdraped with ivy and loveliest creepers, snap-dragons growing on the top, and lightest grasses bowing in the wind. But no wind gets inside to the favored flowers and cabbages, to the riotous plenty of the faint monthly roses and the kingly blue larkspurs, and the striped-coated carnations. A sense of saintliness, sunshine, holy old-fashioned innocent leisure over the whole place.

"This at least is unchanged!" says Joan, in a slow, soft voice, and drawing a long, sighing breath; "this is as we left it."

"For the present," cries Mr. Smith, briskly; "quite for the present. You know that, as they say, Rome was not built in a day. We are coming to it by-and-by—by-and-by."

"What! is not even this to be spared?" cries the girl brokenly, turning her tragic eyes wofully round, on the lovely mellow walls, on the scented glory of the old-world flowers—survivors from an elder day.

"Do you wish it to remain unchanged?" asks Mr. Smith, with surprised *empressement*. "I had no idea—of course, if you express the slightest desire—but" (in a rather mortified tone) "I had imagined that the improvements had met with your approbation. You—you—gave me that impression."

"Do not you think," she answers, turning toward him with a smile, gentle and civil, if steeped in melancholy, "that this one shabby corner will make a good foil for the rest of the new magnificence? But, after all"—(slightly shaking her head)—"it is your taste that is to be consulted—not mine!—after to-day" (shivering a little)—"I shall probably never see the place again."

She has sat down on a broken old stone bench, between whose rifts and clefts little stray seedling flowers and baby-trees are merrily growing. Her hands fall idly on her lap; and, upwafted on the wings of the cabbage-rose scents, her spirit sails away into the past, of which this old garden-plot is verily and indeed a piece. She is brought back to the present by the voice of Mr. Smith. She looks round.

Anthony and the children have disappeared. A momentary bitterness nips her heart. Is this his idea of effacing himself judiciously at the right moment?

Has he, too, become a party to this dismal jest? She glances apprehensively at her companion. He has seated himself on the bench beside her—his own bench, after all. His little freckled face is for the moment as white as his eyelashes; and there is a purpose—hesitant, indeed, and uncertain, but still that frightens her, in his usually purposeless eyes.

"It seems a pity," he is saying, tremulously, snatching a thief-like glance at her every now and then, to see how she is taking his remarks—"you—you—were always so much attached to the Castle, I understand! It—it—it—seems a pity that you—you—should not resume your residence here." As he comes to this last clause he turns his back completely upon her, and so sits in an agony of nervousness, gnawing the top of his stick.

"And turn you out?" she answers, with a fine, cold smile, and a little rallying air that would have baffled a bolder wooer than this; "that would be too ungrateful, after your having so hospitably entertained me; would not it?"

There is a hot, uncomfortable silence.

Joan's eyes are roving uneasily round, trying to discover to what point of the compass Anthony and his tormentors have disappeared—waiting only to be sure, in order to make a desperate rush in that direction. Before, however, she has ascertained this, her companion speaks again.

"It—is—is very large," he says, in a low and quivering voice, still turning to her only the back of his head; "if you remember, I have always said that it was too large for one person!—perhaps it—it—it—might not be too large for *two!*"

"Do you think not?" she says, hastily, and rising. "Ah!"—(with a sigh of relief)—"there is Colonel Wolferstan! he is so good-natured; but we must not allow the children quite to monopolize him, must we?"

So saying, she begins to walk hurriedly along the garden-path, in the direction where she sees Colonel Wolferstan at length emerging from among some distant bushes of late red currants, which the children, with the unerring instinct of their kind for food—unerring, even after such a luncheon as Faustine's—have sniffed out. It is the first time since their coming together again under one roof that she has ever gone willingly to meet him. By the time she reaches him vexation has steeped her face in as lovely a dye as if all the carnations in the garden had given each other rendezvous in her cheeks. She lifts her eyes, full of annoyance and reproach, to his.

"Where have you been?" she cries, irritably. "Why did you go away?—it is not fair to break up a party!"

Anthony is silent; but the look that answers hers makes her at once turn away her upbraiding glance, as she feels with a miserable, uneasy excitement that after all it is only out of the frying-pan into the fire; out of a very small frying-pan into a very large fire; and that there is no rest for her anywhere. She begins to talk again, quickly, and a little at random.

"Why should not we go back through the wilderness?" she asks; "there used to be a wilderness beyond this garden; it is there still; I see the tree-tops waving. We used to get to it through that door" (pointing to a small arched one in the wall). "Ah!" (going up to it), "it is locked."

"If you like—if you wish," says Mr. Smith, in a crestfallen voice, having, in the mean while, come up with them, "I will go and inquire for the key; no doubt some of the gardeners have one."

No one tries to dissuade him, and he sets off at once on this self-imposed errand. No sooner is he out of sight than, "Why, here is the key!" cries Faustine, who has been occupying herself in applying an inquiring eye to the key-hole; in pulling out loose bricks, dislodging old-established wood-lice, and tweaking little cranesbills by their long noses; and now, in her pryings, has suddenly discovered

the missing article, snugly lying crusted with iron-mould in a convenient cranny.

"I will run and call Mr. Smith back," says Rupert, officiously, beginning to suit the action to the word.

"You will do nothing of the kind!" cries Wolferstan, sharply, making a detaining clutch at the child's shoulders; then, becoming aware by Rupert's face of the angry peremptoriness of his own tone, he adds, in a gentler key: "I mean, my boy, that it is not worth while; he will soon find out his mistake and overtake us!"

So saying, he fits the rusty key into the lock; it turns unwillingly, with a grinding sound; the disused hinges give way sulkily, and they all step out together into the green tangle beyond. Once there has evidently been a path through it—a path where two might walk abreast; but Nature, who, leave her to herself but a very little while, quietly takes back man's thefts, repairs the rents he has made in her cloak, has been taking back—mending here, too. As they pass along, the grasses coolly trammel their feet. The brambles hold out to them the tart plenty of their crude berries; and the disflowered brier-rose catches at them with long fingers, crying, "Stay!" Around them the honeysuckle ambitiously climbs the trees, blowing its late trumpets, safe and high, aloft; and the briony ties hazel to haw in loving green bonds. Above them the trees have laid together the friendly variety of their leaves, the sycamore its broad platter, and the horse-chestnut its fan, in league to keep out the sun. But at present there is no sun to keep out. Surely he was here—but now! How long is it since the clouds, sweeping up from their unseen chambers, have clean abolished his smile?

On the woodland path there is now no play of gamesome lights, no frolic of little shadows. Instead, everywhere, one same verdurous gloom. A tempered light, as when day dies; a silence, as of poppied sleep. Of all God's strong winds there is not one awake. No lightest gust either sighs or laughs, either rings the bluebell's silent chime, or puffs away the little hawkweed clocks. The birds, too, are dumb. By August, their talk is mostly outtalked, their madrigals outsung; but to-day, not even a garrulous finch twitters, or sparrow cheeps. A hot and drowsy stillness weighs, lead-heavy, upon all. Hardly less still than the winds—hardly less silent than the song-birds—the young man and the young woman step along together, side by side.

Joan has taken off her hat, and loosened her little kerchief from about her milk-white throat. Whether it be from the thunderous weight of the air, or the oppression of the long day's ignoble suffering, she feels as if an iron band were tightly clasped around her brow. All day her spirit has been stretched upon the rack; broken on the wheel. All day she has been, with stiff, tight smiles and combated tears, helping at the desecration of her own altars. All day long she has been clapping hands and applauding at her own execution. Now, at least, she may be silent. She need no longer commend the ingenuity of the thumb-screw that dislocates her fingers, or of the boot that crushes her foot: now she may rest. This rest, indeed—fevered, hard-pulsed, thundering-hearted—is as much like real rest as the repose that narcotics give a sickly man is like the royal slumber that God gives a healthy child. But, after all, an opiate sleep is better than none. Why should they talk?—they, to whom all speech worthy of the name is forbidden! If, indeed, their intercourse were likely to be prolonged and stretch over any considerable space of future time, it would be fit to practise themselves in the necessary falsity of civil, light talk and empty phrase. But is it not the last day—the last day of all?—is not this the very last walk, during which they are ever likely to pace together the green-kirtled summer-land? they who once thought that they should walk—tender hand in tender

hand—to the distant undreaded grave! It is through no fault of their own that they are now in each other's company.

Joan's conscience is at ease on that score. It is fate and chance that have thus brought them helpless and unconsenting into transient contact. Nor is there anything of *gênant* or embarrassing in this *tête-à-tête*, which is broken every two or three minutes by one or other of the children, returning from snatching excursions into the brake: Faustine to exhibit a bramble-scratch; Rupert to brag of the pheasants he has started; both to ask loudly for arbitration on some wrangled point. Joan does not know how long they have thus together dumbly trod the wood's lush intricacies—how long this quiet trance—not itself exactly of pain, but with pain for background, pain for foreground, pain for horizon—has lasted, when it is broken in upon by a sudden, kingly noise, not made or makable by man, or any of his engines; the sound of a loud and angry thunder-clap. It has been growling and sulkily muttering in the distance all the afternoon, but nobody has heeded it. The children come running back in scared haste pushing through cornel and brier.

"O Miss Dering," cries Faustine, her small, bold face already paled with fear, "did you hear the thunder? I am so frightened!—let us go home!"

"Mitchell says that there was a man struck by lightning the other day," says Rupert, encouragingly; "he was as black as a coal all down one side!"

"We had better get out of this as quickly as we can," says Anthony, rousing himself, and looking round at the close-growing tree-trunks—the interlaced branches—the thick leaf roof; "we could not well be in a worse place!"

"We must be nearly through the wood," says Joan, waking up again to present realities; "five minutes will bring us into one of the park-drives."

They all begin to walk quickly in the direction indicated; the children, indeed, take to their heels and run. No one speaks; nor is there in all the wood one lightest sound. It seems as if every bird, and beast, and insect, were listening with held breath for the sky's next loud speech. Joan's memory has misled her as to distance. It is twenty minutes, instead of five, before they emerge into the open. Just as they do so, there comes a mighty rolling crash overhead, as if God were driving his chariot along the clouds, and, before you can count one, a lovely sudden arrow of deathful light has leaped into their eyes.

It is come and gone, and they are in the dark again. For by this time it has grown very dark—darker than at the middest of many a clear-faced summer night. The clouds—but now piled on the horizon—quiet, sun-kissed Alps—have rushed into one pitchy mass—a canopy of ink; out of which, momently, the lightning springs in blinding glory. Faustine has covered her face with both hands, and so stumbles on; Rupert, with his brag and his high courage extinct, is beginning to blubber, and to clutch at the out-held hands of Joan and Anthony, as they hastily drag him along.

"Thank God we are out of the wood!" says Joan, cheerfully.—"Hold up, Rupert!—we shall soon be home now!"

But, though she speaks confidently, her heart sinks a little as she sees how much farther off than she had imagined rise the sheltering towers of Dering, a good half-mile away at the least. They have reached the park-drive, and are posting breathlessly along it, through the alternate dread noise and dreader silence, when, in one of these latter intervals of ominous quiet, they become aware of the sound of rolling wheels and trotting hoofs coming up behind them. They turn to see an empty coal-cart advancing at its heavy horse's best speed on their tracks. As it draws near, Anthony steps into the middle of the road and hails it.

"Are you going to the castle?—be-

cause, if so, will you give these children a lift?"

No sooner said than done. On ordinary occasions Faustine would have looked upon it as very much below the dignity of Miss Smith Deloraine to be wedged between two grimy men on the tilt of a coal-cart, behind a shaggy-heeled cart-horse; but fear has taken all the glory out of her, as it has taken all the brag out of her brother. She would be thankful for even the apothecary and dung-cart prophesied her.

"That was a good move," says Joan, with a sigh of relief and ended responsibility; "they will be in before the rain comes!"

As she speaks—in the twinkle of an eye—the whole world is lit up by one sudden green glare, intolerably lovely, against which the castle's four towers are cut out clean and fine as cameos; and, at the same instant, a giant rain-drop splashes on the girl's cheek. Its successors are not slow in following it. Down they come, straight and numberless, with such a spiteful force and fierceness as if they were being shot from skyey guns; and mixed with them bullets of hail that bruise and bite.

They have taken to the grass again, so as to make a short cut to the house. Joan has given her sole protection against the weather—her flimsy sun-shade—to Faustine. The mighty rain patters and smites on an absolutely undefended head.

"This is bad for you," says Anthony, as with stooped head and blinking eyes he butts against the storm; the hail-stones pelting his eyelids, and driving into his mouth the moment that he opens it.

"Do you think so?" she says, cheerily, though blinking too, and gasping a little; "I do not mind it!—it is—it is much better than the improvements!" (with a breathless laugh).

They are nearing a knoll, clad with low scrub, and out of which, here and there, a morsel of bare rock shows itself disconnected and unexplained, among the general green flat of grass and bracken.

"There used to be a sort of cave here," says Joan, indistinctly, with her mouth full of hail-stones, and her eyes screwed up to peer across the opaqueness of the tempest; "had not we better shelter there a while?"

As she speaks, she redoubles her speed; and, outrunning him, is lost for a moment from sight round a small projecting bowlder that has advanced its gray foot among the fern.

In a moment he has overtaken her. Close above their heads there is a dread hurly-burly as of thousands of great rocks being angrily trundled down a giant hill-side. An opportune splendor of flame shows them the friendly mouth of a natural hole in the mimic hill-side; and, pushing aside the wet and streaming creepers that overdrape it, they enter, and find themselves at peace.

## CHAPTER X.

Half an hour has passed, and the storm is beginning to wear itself out. The majestic clamor in the heavens, that made all meaner noises small, is becoming less incessant. The two young people less continuously see eace other's face perilously glorified by that superb dread shining; but the rain, on the other hand, has redoubled its vigor. The huge drops have merged into one colossal wet sheet, which fills the air and makes the earth one rushing river. Hitherto neither of them has spoken. It would, indeed, have been useless, as neither could have heard the other's voice in the midst of the ear-rending warfare overhead.

Anthony has stood at the mouth of the cave, watching the weather, and Joan has sat down on a bit of rock, which, having fallen at some remote period from the roof, now makes a comfortable seat. Their refuge is but a shallow natural ex-

cavation, sloping backward. Only the front part is high enough to allow of a tall man standing upright in it, but it is daintily floored with fine sand; and in the chinks of its rough walls—stained here and there by a trickle of water—delicate aspleniums flourish, and tufts of stout heartstongue hang. Anthony has just put his head out between the drenched fluff-balls and streaming tendrils of the traveler's-joy, that makes a curtain before their retreat, and taken a look at the sky. Then he draws it back again, and advances toward his fellow-sufferer.

"It will be over in ten minutes," he says, confidently.

"And we are neither of us black all down one side," answers Joan, lifting her small flower-face with a smile to his. She has raised both hands to her head, in the endeavor to restore it to its usual robin-like sleekness, but as most of its hair-pins have disappeared, and it is unmanageably wet, this is a task beyond the power of even her deft fingers. The band of iron seems loosened now from about her brows. The spirits of the storm seem to have set hers free. It is no longer bowed and groveling on the earth.

He stands for a few moments in silence, discomfortably following the quick movements of her slim hands with his envious gray eyes. Then—

"Now tell me," he says, feverishly; "I have been waiting till we could hear the sound of our own voices. All through the wood I was trying to bring myself to ask you, but I could not—I can now. Have you any piece of news for me?—anything to tell me?—quick!"

Her arms are still lifted, her fingers still straying among the soft strands of her bright hair.

"Any piece of news?" she repeats, in a puzzled voice.

"I obeyed orders," he goes on, with a dry laugh; "you cannot say that I stood in your light. I *effaced myself judiciously*, did not I?" (with a bitter mimicking of his wife's tone).

She understands now. She lets her arms fall with a petulant gesture into her lap. A flush as faint as the earliest dawn-birth paints the complete pallor of her cheeks.

"Was the bribe big enough?" he goes on, harshly. "I know that it is the biggest that could be offered to you."

Her little white chin sinks forward on the wet breast of her calico gown, whose poor fabric the great rain-drops have saturated. She shakes her head with a movement of negation and distaste.

"It is no bribe now."

"Then it is not to be?" (his breathless words treading pantingly on the heels of her answer).

She straightens her slender body, and draws up her proud young throat, while the pale dawn-blush deepens into the angry ruddiness of a winter after-glow.

"I must, indeed, have come down in the world," she says in a compressed, low voice, "before it could have seemed probable to any one."

He draws a deep, long breath, as one reprieved.

"And besides," she adds, after a moment's thought, in a voice so low as to be scarcely audible, "there is the same bar that there always was against my marrying any one."

"Which is none at all," he breaks in contemptuously. "Does that rotten cord still hold? I know that it held gallantly once"—(with a sneer)—"but is it possible that it holds still? Well, some fine day it will snap. It is out of Nature that it should not; and whoever fights against Nature must, sooner or later, go to the wall; sooner or later"—(with a strained smile)—"you will go to the wall! It may not be to-day, or to-morrow, or the day after that, but on some to-morrow"—(still keeping that hard, tense smile)—"I shall certainly hear—my ears are always listening for it—Joan Dering is married!"

"And you will say, 'I am glad,'" she

says, trembling a little, but raising her patient blue eyes to the passionate trouble of his—his that used, in the old time, to brim over with such sheer jollity and life-delight; "'being her true, honest friend, I am glad.'"

"It would be the best thing that could happen to you!" he says, grudgingly; leaning one vigorous shoulder against the low rock-wall, while his covetous regard still holds and thrills her; and the rain sings and swishes down outside, and the creeper-curtain shuts them close from the outer world—them two alone together; "brave as you are—none braver—I know that—high as you hold your head—you are but a weakly thing to be let go at large in this big, blustering world, with no one to give or take buffets for you!"

"Am I so weakly?" she says, with the same flickering smile hovering about her tender mouth; but yet with a little air of spirit and resolve; "so you told me three years and a half ago—there"—(nodding slightly in the direction of the castle)—"but you see that I am still alive! I still hold my head above water; my feet have a firmer grip of this earth than you think for."

"Three years and a half!" he repeats with an accent of slow reflection. "Ah! but"—(looking at her piercingly)—"what sort of a three years and a half have they been?"

For a moment she winces as one suddenly stabbed, but instantly recovers herself.

"I have suffered!" she says, steadily, "but I have enjoyed too; these sufferings were like sharp rocks here and there; the pleasures like fine sand strewed all over my life. One is very ungrateful," she says, humbly; "one remembers the large pains, but one does not remember all the flowers one has smelt—all the jokes one has laughed at—all the deep sleeps and pleasant dreams one has had."

"You are philosophic," he says, harshly; "but suppose that the next three years are like them, and the next three again after that? how then?"

She shudders perceptibly, and for a moment covers her face with her hands; then—

"That is impossible!" she says, steadily. "Did you ever hear of any one having his head cut off *twice?*"

There is a silence. The rain's rush has waxed fainter; the storm is bearing its royal clamor and its beautiful death-arrows otherwhere.

Anthony has again restlessly walked to the cave's mouth. He has stretched out his handsome head, so that the raindrops may fall upon it and assuage its hot ache. They are glistening crystal bright on his brown locks, as he turns and again approaches her. It is such a confined space that two steps bring him quite close to her—so close that, if he did but stretch out his arms ever so little, they would encompass her lithe body and its limp cotton sheath. His face is white and his lips are twitching.

"All the possibilities of life are ahead of you, as they are behind me," he says in a bitter, low voice. "Take my advice—do not throw them away next time—do not cut a second man's throat for his own good; for my part, I doubt its always answering; when next some poor fellow tries to light a fire, by which he may warm himself all his days, in the depth of those angel-sweet, ice-cold eyes of yours—in God's name let him!"

She has risen to her feet, trembling more than any wind-shaken leaf on an autumn tree-top. Passion-pale, they stand facing each other.

"I have been on the rack all day," she says, in a voice of concentrated suffering and reproach; "are you determined not to let me get off it? are you resolved that this day shall be marked by *every* kind of pain? What do you mean by twitting me with my cold eyes—my quietly-beating heart? It is not the first time! What do you mean, I say, by it? If you had any mercy—if you had any

common humanity—you would be glad—most glad for my sake that they *are* cold! What better gift than coldness," she cries, lifting passionate hands and anguished eyes to the low rock-roof above her, "has God now left in all his treasury to give me?"

So saying, she slips hastily past him, and, though the rain is still falling sharply from the departing clouds, passes resolutely out through the streaming traveler's-joy, into the drenched grass beyond. What can he do but follow her? In swiftest silence they walk along. The sycamores empty their broad platters on their heads, as they pass beneath; and the bracken wets them almost waist-high. To traverse the soaked grass is like wading a river.

Before they have gone ten paces, Joan's thin summer boots are so full of water that they rattle as she goes, and on her whole shivering body there is not one dry stitch. But what does it matter? What does any present discomfort or future rheumatism matter, in comparison with that suffocating *tête-à-tête?*

It will soon be ended now. In ten minutes she will be safely housed in the midst of her securely tiresome daily *entourage*, hedged from all perilous encounters by Faustine's exacting calls for attention, and Rupert's monopolizing arms. But will she? They have reached the castle, only to find that their fellow-travelers have set off home without them.

"And left us behind?" gasps Joan, in a voice of disbelief and consternation; "impossible!"

"It you please 'm," says the butler, with explanatory sweetness—(he knows all about Joan, and has the contempt for commerce and the feeling for *cidevants* so common among good-class servants)—"if you please 'm, the ladies thought it best to take advantage of the first break in the storm; the buggy is still here, and Mr. Smith Deloraine left word that he hoped Colonel Wolferstan would be so good as to drive Miss Dering home in it!"

Joan sinks down on a chair, regardless of the injury that her wet contact is inflicting on Mr. Smith's *capitonné* blue satin—sinks down with a feeling of defeat and checkmatedness. Of what use is it to fight—to draw one's wooden sword, and set one's lathen spear in rest, when man and beast, woman and child, storm and tempest, conspire to combat against one?

They are off now. Joan has been partially and capriciously dried at the kitchen-fire. Her shoulder-blades indeed still feel sticky, and there is a general sense of adhesiveness about her whole costume; but her boots no longer rattle, nor do cold and trickly rills race down the nape of her neck. Away they go, with the speed naturally resulting from a feather-light carriage, and a free, fresh horse homeward turned. The very nature of the vehicle is against her, necessitating, as it does, close proximity, and excluding even the poor chaperonage of a groom's presence. Away they go, arrow-swift, through the dusking country. For the evening draws on apace. The sky's ill-humor is ended. The clouds that, a while ago, shocked together with such a fury, have now drawn peaceably apart again. Along the horizon they quietly lie in lofty ranges, vaporous Andes, that in this uncertain light look nigh as solid as real mountains. The dust is asleep; a great glistering rain-drop hangs on each sharp hedge-row thorn. There is a pleasant sound of falling and pattering among the full-leaved trees.

The slight noise of the large, light wheels, the quick plash of the iron hoofs through the new-made puddles, are the only sounds that break the complete evening silence. Very little speech passes between the young man and the young woman. They used to be so garrulous when they were together!—chattering lengthily, like happy children. Once he has formally asked her if she were cold; and once she has restlessly inquired how much farther they have to go. A fever-

ish, longing haste to be at the end—to have it over—mixed with a bitter, contradictory pang of regret, as each fresh mile-stone flies past, is making Joan's blood painfully burn and prick along her veins, and her sad heart heavily throb.

As for Anthony, he is away—back in the past. How often in the old time, during her visit to the Abbey, did they two thus drive together, unchaperoned, servantless, in sweet and sociable solitude through the darkling summer-land! She was full as near to him then as she is now. There was then no reason in heaven or hell why he should not load her with the all-tender names, which now, forbidden, sinful, harshly commanded back, crowd to his parched lips.

There were then no unseen arms of fate and iron law interposing between them, and waving them aloof. Then neither God nor man forbade that he should gather this sweetest lily and wear it, year out, year in, upon his heart. And yet, then he had with cold and cautious content addressed her as "Miss Dering," had flooded her patient ear with facile, banal talk, and egotistic anecdotes about himself. It seems incredible! The storm, as I have said, is gone; but we can plainly tell that elsewhere it is still pouring out the vials of its wrath and dealing its bolts. None of its thunder is indeed now ever so faintly heard; but now and again all the eastern heavens are lit up by one broad, reflected glory—one tranquil, yellow lustre of sheet-lightning, as if for a noble moment the gates of God's palace had been rolled back, and the inner splendor allowed to come pouring through.

"We look as if we were driving straight into heaven!" says Joan, in a voice of tremulous admiration, fixing her wistful eyes on the lovely phantasmagoria that, even as she looks, vanishes and is swallowed up.

"Do we?" he answers. "Nay"—(with an accent of profound melancholy)—"I think that some time ago we missed the way there."

These are the last words that they speak. The drive has come to its conclusion; the good horse stands still; the miry wheels no longer lightly turn. The hall-lamps flash out upon them; the servants come to the door. Silently Wolferstan has lifted her down, and without a word she turns and begins to drag her stiff limbs through the vestibule, up the staircase, along the corridor.

Surely the fight is ended now—now that this last hard day touches its end. Surely to-morrow's sun will rise upon a safe blank, as free from danger as from possible joy. She has reached the schoolroom, and crossed its threshold before she perceives that he has followed her. Two lit candles stand on the table, but there are no other signs of occupancy. It is empty.

"I have come to say good-by," he says, in a matter-of-fact voice.

"You go early?" she says, hastily and with an artificial smile.

"At 8.30."

"Then of course it *is* good-by" (holding out her hand).

He takes it, but the expression of his face is scarcely one of farewell.

"It is good-by," he repeats, "but it is not the long, vague good-by you think; it is only good-by for a week. Do you know"—(his whole face breaking up into a happy laughter)—"that the man to whom I was going for the first has thrown me over, and Smith Deloraine has asked me to come here instead?"

"And you are coming?" (breathlessly).

He nods, "Yes."

She makes no sort of rejoinder. Again that feeling of overpowering panic, of irretrievable defeat, has mastered her.

Have not gods and men joined hands in one bond against her? The battle is not over, after all; perhaps it has scarcely begun. Bad as to-day has been, it has been only the Quatre-Bras of which the Waterloo is yet to follow.

"So it is scarcely more than good-

night," he says, softly; his fond and covetous eyes taking in all the pitiful details of her appearance—small, fagged face, the dark, tired stains under the heavy eyes, the pathetically drooped red mouth, the forlorn gown clinging to the pretty, willowy figure.

"A week passes by like a flash, doesn't it? but yet it is good-by too. Joan—" (her disused name coming strangely to her ears in a whisper, as the young man turns from white to red and from red to white)—"Joan—whose fault is it that we need ever have said good-by at all?"

Perhaps he is resolved that to that tough question she shall give no answer; for at the next clock-tick her stammering lips are close shut by his kisses, and her heart is beating out its agony on his. For one moment she lies quiet—bewildered soul and worn-out body in that forbidden shelter; then, with a rush of recollected anguish, she wrests herself away from him; and looking at him for a moment fixedly, yet with a wildness as of one whose wits are wandering, she staggers away.

. . . . . .

The day's pleasuring is ended. Faustine's profuse tears for her ruined flounces—only partially dried by the assurance that the wash-tub and the mangle will restore them to their original stiff elegance—have had their current stemmed by slumber. Montacute, physicked into convalescence, has fallen asleep despite all his nurse's remonstrances, with Leviticus for pillow; his last waking word being a posing question, which has brought the blush to his attendant's cheek, as to one of the more subtile niceties of the Mosaic law.

Most even of the grown-up members of the expedition have gone to bed early, fagged and cross. Joan's duties are ended. Till eight o'clock to-morrow morning her time is her own. She is in her bedroom, standing before her glass, staring steadfastly, as if it were a new sight, at the face which that glass gives back; at the privet-white cheeks, at the horrified blue eyes looking out at her in frosty dismay, at the pinched, set mouth.

"Whither am I going?" she says out loud, stonily watching her reflected lips as they stiffly move. "Whither am I dragging him?" Then clasping her lifted hands above her head, she stumbles forward, and, with an utter collapse of all restraint and self-government, sinks upon the floor, and so, through the watches of the night, lies all along in deepest abasement before God. Is not a bed too soft for such as she? Are not the hard boards a fitter place for her to pour out her tears and penitential groans? The still hours walk over her with their soundless feet. Through the wide window there steals now and then a little wakeful gust, that, sighing softly awhile about the dusky room, sinks like all else to sleep again.

"Oh, love!" she says aloud, burying her burning face on her out-flung arms, while great, tearless sobs make all her prostrate body shake and quiver—"oh, poor unstable love! with all my high talk and large professions, what have I ever been but a curse and a cruelty to you? Was not it enough for me to have blundered away your happiness? must I tempt you to taint your honor too?"

Her voice dies away in utter brokenness, and for a while there is silence. Then, by-and-by, she speaks again.

"There is only one poor kindness now left me to do for you!" she says, more collectedly; "to take myself at once wholly and forever out of your life; it is the last, meagre gift I shall ever give you; let me at least give it promptly."

Then she is once more dumb; only now and again a catching of the breath, a dry, hard sob, tell that to her through all the sleepy hours sleep's solace never comes. Once before has she kept a vigil in love's name; on that austerest winter night at Helmsley when she had first heard of her fickle love's early faithlessness. Even so then had she fought

and wrestled all night; pushing with useless, tender hands against Fate's iron doors, and with the cold dawn victory came. Thus it is now. She has raised herself from her attitude of despair and abasement. She is leaning against the casement, no longer sobbing or moaning; tranquilly watching the coming of the young new morn. There is as yet no earliest sun-peep, and, nevertheless, all over the face of Nature there is a look of expectant surety. When he is climbing in red glory over the elm-tops it will be not more certain that he is coming than now when no faintest tinge of his smile paints the high orient gates. Never since the world swung round has he failed to come. He will come to-day. As she so thinks, a feeling of solemn, awful comfort steals over her heart, at the sense of the utter certainty of the Hand—whosesoever it may be, wrangle as we may over that—that guides the world; the Hand that never makes an uncertain stroke or a blurred outline.

"It will be right!" she says, looking toward the east; her lovely sunk eyes serene with faith and reverence. "By-and-by it will be right!"

## CHAPTER XI.

It is now five days since the Dering pleasure-party. Even as a theme of school-room talk it is worn prematurely threadbare. In the natural course of things it might have outlasted a week, but, as it is, a new topic has elbowed it away. Of the fifth day there is now but little to run. In half an hour the sun will be gone. His fire-horses are stretching in their last gallop. These are almost the latest arrows in his quiver, that he is shooting into the Smith Deloraine school-room. They are lighting up an overset ink-bottle, topsy-turvy chairs, dislocated grammars and disemboweled histories, diverted from their natural uses to hurtle as missiles through the air: a young Mœnad, with rent gathers and tempestuous mane, flying in stormy gallop, armed with a fire-shovel over the prostrate furniture, in hot pursuit of two fugitive boys, both bellowing—the one with the joy of battle, the other with the fear. For the reign of Chaos and old Night has come again, and the young Smith Deloraines have a month's holiday.

This is the way in which they are inaugurating it. It is sudden and unlooked-for good fortune which mostly turns people's heads. Perhaps it is the unexpectedness of their boon of liberty which makes them, and frightfully, misuse it. A week ago no such emancipation was even talked of. But, to the surprise of every one, Miss Dering, whose summer holidays have been delayed thus late to suit her employer's convenience, and who, indeed, has hitherto shown a great indifference as to whether she has any summer holidays at all, has, on the day after the Dering party, asked for—with a quiet insistance which makes refusal difficult, and consequently obtained—a month's leave of absence. To be off—to be well away before the day of Anthony's announced return—this appears to her the one necessity which for her life still holds.

It seems as if stern-eyed angels had come to her as they came to Syrian Lot as he sat at eventide at his city gate in the old time, bidding her arise and flee for her life. And she, docilely listening to that inner voice, has arisen and fled. To-day she has been traveling all day long; her head is full of noise, and her eyes of grit. But the railway part of her journey is now ended. In a hired fly she is tardily jogging through the suburbs of Helmsley. The horse goes but slowly after his kind. "Not nearly so fast as the butcher's did," she says to herself, with a grim smile of recollection; so she has plenty of leisure to note the changes that two years and a half have wrought.

The scaffolding-poles are fewer and the stuccoed houses more. The brick-fields have shrunk and the deodaras grown. The town is stretching out thriving arms, which will soon take Portland Villa into their embrace. Even the hospital has thrown out an ugly wing from its bald, square bulk. The four little brother-villas are in sight now—even on them change has passed. Sardanapalus has painted its shutters green; Campidoglio has added a story to its height. Only Portland Villa remains wholly unaltered, save for the necessary action of time and decay. There are a few more tiles missing from the roof, a few more patches of plaster from the walls; but that is all. The gate is still off its hinges, and still tied up with string. She looks out with interest, as the driver pulls and fumbles at it. To all appearance it is the identical fragment of rotten cord which secured it when last she rolled through.

They have turned in now; down the little weedy drive comes the old pattering avalanche of dogs' feet—the same hallelujah chorus of loud pug voices. So to the sound of music Joan's vehicle draws up at the portal.

"If you please, 'm," says the driver, returning from a useless quest to the fly-door, "I'm afraid I cannot ring, the bell is broke."

Still broken after two years and a half! On this particular occasion it is not of much consequence, as the door is now quickly opened, and the aperture is filled with eager, welcoming faces—all one broad smile, with welcoming voices outdoing each other and almost the dogs in loud salutations. The next moment Joan is in her aunt's copious embrace. One after another three pairs of substantial arms warmly infold her. A feeling of remorse nips the girl's spirit that, after all, she has perhaps not set enough store by her place in these homely hearts. Long ago, indeed, she has repaid them, and with ample usury, her pecuniary ... tions, but love is paid only by itself. In this debt has not she been but a laggard debtor?

They have passed into the drawing-room now; one of Joan's hands firmly held by Mrs. Moberley, the other by Di. Formerly she would have shrunk from having her fingers thus imprisoned; but time and its austere experience of the outer world's unlovingness have made her thankfully take affection's clasp, even though it may be a rather sultry one.

"This is but a poor home-coming for you, Joan," says Mrs. Moberley, sinking down into the roomy shabbiness of her own chimney-corner chair, and in so doing slightly protruding a boot burst in exactly the same place as of old. (Can it possibly, in defiance of all the probabilities of time and leather, be the same boot?) "But you gave us no notice, child; if you had sent us but the least pen-scratch a week ago, we would have had a few of them down from the Barracks to make a little fun; they are not" (shaking her head) "as good a lot as our old ones—more inclined to be high, and not so ready to take one as they find one, but still"—(with a smile of philosophic satisfaction)—"after all, the army is the army, when all is said and done."

"We did stare when we got your letter," cries Bell, widely opening her large round eyes, her whole complacent, fat face, intricately towering hair, and lengthily floating curl, pleasantly agitated by curiosity. "I think" (looking down with an inexplicable air of consciousness) "that, if we had not had a good many things to think of just lately, we should never have left off guessing and wondering about it."

"No disagreeableness, I hope, Joan?" says Mrs. Moberley, with a not unkindly inquisitiveness in her jovial eye. "You have not had any tiff with your mistress, I hope?"

Mrs. Moberley can never be persuaded that there is any difference between the phraseology of servitude and that of tuition. Joan shakes her head.

"Oh no, nothing."

"What does it matter what has brought her?" cries Diana, brusquely, coming as of yore to the rescue, since she sees a look of disquiet and embarrassment on her cousin's face; "that is her business; she is here now—that is ours."

"Of course," answers Bell, still with a continuance of that mystic consciousness, and holding her head extremely on one side; "only that coming just now it happens so pat that one is almost inclined to think that there is something not quite canny about it."

"To be sure!" cries Mrs. Moberley, heartily, brought back by this suggestion to the remembrance of their own glories and interests, which her niece's arrival has momentarily thrust into the background of her mind.—"Well, Joan, whatever you may have to tell us, we have a piece of news to tell you: we are going to have a wedding in the family"—(her whole face breaking up into triumphant smiles, and putting on her spectacles, the better to watch the effect of her communication on her niece's countenance). "What do you think of that?"

"Indeed!" cries Joan, in an accent of unaffected interest and excitement, her look involuntarily turning at once toward the rustic charms of Diana, with an inward wonder as to whether the tardy Micky has at length come to the front; her feelings divided between physical repulsion from the idea of him as a first-cousin, and joy at the thought of poor Diana's long fidelity meeting with its reward.

But Diana shakes her curly head.

"You need not look at me! it is not I; I am still to be had!" she says, dryly.

"Bell, then!"

But Bell is in no case to reply. Virgin shame has too completely mastered her. It is only from the ineffable bliss and hurt modesty of her large, drooped face that Joan can gather her answer.

"The first break in a family is a sad thing," says Mrs. Moberley, trying to subdue her jubilant features into a decent semblance of pensive regret; "but in other respects I am sure I have not a word to say! One of our old lot and of her poor papa's profession, and altogether—I have always said"—(with a relieved lapse into mirth, as sudden as the leap back into uprightness of an unstrung bow)—"that it would be very handy to have a medical man in the family!"

"He is the doctor in the 170th," says Diana, with laconic explanation; "don't you remember him? we never would dance with him."

"The regiment is at Cork now," continues Mrs. Moberley, her complacent flow of narrative undisturbed by her second daughter's uncomplimentary observation; "the bride and bridegroom are to join at once after the wedding; there she will be among all the old set, and quite one of themselves too now. I declare I can't help envying her! as I said to him the other day" (beginning again to laugh), "I have half a mind to marry him myself."

"It is quite an old attachment," says Bell, having by this time recovered the power of utterance, though she still speaks in a small, coy voice, as if she were saying something indecent. "It is more than two years since he began to be particular. I remember so well that the first time I noticed anything out of the way was the day that you and Mrs. Wolferstan passed us in the barouche; we had just been changing hats for a bit of fun, and you came round the corner so suddenly upon us, that we had scarcely time to change back. I thought I should have expired! I remember his saying what a pretty girl you were, and that he hoped you would get a good husband."

Three years ago Joan would have shuddered and shrunk like a touched sensitive-plant at hearing such a wish expressed by such lips, but time has made her more lenient.

"It was very good of him," she says, smiling gently and without irony; "I pass on the wish to you now heartily."

"He is not a bit like a doctor when you come to know him," says Mrs. Moberley, narratively; "quite a sporting fellow in his way, and almost as fond of his jokes as Micky was. Ah, Micky!" —(with a sigh bracketed between two smiles)—"we were all a little disappointed in him, I think. He was one of those that love and that ride away."

As she speaks she glances meaningly in the direction of Diana, which would sufficiently explain her allusion, were there any present to whom it needed explanation. There is a temporary silence.

Joan's eyes have wandered round the little room with a far more eager interest, if with infinitely less surprise and contempt, than they did on the first evening of her coming; its shabby, cheap smartness is now as nothing to her. The tragic memories with which almost every article of its commonplace, sordid furniture is loaded, have cast out and abolished all the feelings of hurt taste and æsthetic disgust with which they had formerly filled her. There is the very door, with its paint almost entirely scratched off for a good foot above the ground by the dogs in their requests for exit and entry, against which she had set her back to forbid Mrs. Wolferstan's escape, while she wrung from her that bitter secret which has since made dark all her fair white life and his too. There is the faded, once gaudy tablecloth on which he had desperately flung down his brown head when he came to her on that snowy midnight in his madness. There—to go back to earlier, lighter memories—is the identical trumpery vase in which she had grudgingly set his coveted flowers. How unchanged it all is! Is it possible that she has been away at all? As she so thinks her eyes fall on the dogs, who are now politely but firmly smelling her all over before readmitting her into the family. Then, indeed, doubt as to the period of her absence from Portland Villa is at an end. Time has plenteously poured his snows on Mr. Brown's serious face, and has turned even his stiff whiskers white; while from Regy and Algy the trifling, if amiable, levity that so eminently distinguished them has forever disappeared. It would ill sit upon dogs of such a portly respectability as theirs. They look as if they were householders, rate-payers, almost church-wardens; while as for Charlie, his place knows him no more. Joan's meditations are presently broken in upon by the voice of Bell, timid and virginal as before.

"He was anxious to come in this evening," she says, bashfully, "but I would not hear of it. One must"—(simpering) —"draw the line somewhere. There is no saying how much he wishes to see you; he says he is sure he shall feel much more like a brother than a cousin to you."

"I am afraid that we shall have to make rather a smart turn out of it," says Mrs. Moberley, trying to temper with a few grains of factitious regret the exuberant, frolicsome jollity of her eyes and tone; "people seem to expect it of us: half a dozen bridesmaids and a groom apiece; there is the beauty of a garrison town—one never need run short of beaux! They say"—(throwing a hopeful and encouraging look upon her niece and younger daughter)—"that one marriage makes many. Well, we shall see!"

## CHAPTER XII.

". . . . Was the trial sore?
Temptation sharp? Thank God! a second time
Why comes temptation but for man to meet
And master and make crouch beneath his foot,
And so be pedestaled in triumph?"
*The Ring and the Book.*

JOAN'S return is now a three-days-old event. She is no longer treated with guest-privileges or guest-formality, but has subsided easily, and as a matter of course, into her niche as one of themselves. Even their curiosity as to the

cause of her sudden reappearance among them—a curiosity which ought to be all the keener, seeing that it is never gratified—has died, swallowed up by the more absorbing and personal topics of Bell's trousseau, Bell's cake, Bell's bridesmaids.

Joan has smiled to herself once or twice with ironic sadness at the recollection of her unnecessary fears as to the difficulty she would find in parrying their questions and baffling their kindly inquisitiveness; when, in fact, there is after all no one sufficiently interested in the matter to try to force the lock, or even turn the key of her shut confidence.

It is afternoon now. All morning she has been diligently stitching at Bell's going-away gown, which, after the wedding-dress itself, is, perhaps, the culminating point of interest in the whole *corbeille;* stitching as she formerly stitched at the alpacas, which were destined to fill with awful admiration the men, and with panic-struck envy the women of the 170th regiment. She has no longer indeed any Paris patterns to sacrifice; but what she has—her skilled labor, her artistic instinct, her patience, and her taste—she gives readily; more readily, indeed, with a greater simplicity, and less sense of being a martyr, than in the old time.

She is rewarded by Bell's exuberant gratitude, and by her expansive assurance that "she will do as much for her when her hour comes!" (with an affected sigh and a proud smile); by Mrs. Moberley's encouraging asseveration that "she would save any man that married her fifty pounds a year; and that she, Mrs. Moberley, will take care to let him know it;" and by the silent but admiring gratitude of Diana's eyes.

She is free now; free for the whole afternoon; free to go wherever she lists, except into the Portland Villa drawing-room, which, on these latter days, has, from dinner to tea-time, been consecrated as a temple of love, into which no profane foot dare to intrude. She has, therefore, set out on a walk with the dogs. During the last two days she has been making sad pilgrimages to the scenes where her short love-drama played itself out; as one that, returning after absence, to find dead those whom he left alive, travels pensively from new grave to new grave.

Yesterday she stood among the sandhills, looking seaward; trying again to set her feet with melancholy accuracy in exactly that spot of the waste sameness where she had mistakenly, and to his life-long hurt, renounced him. To-day her steps are carrying her toward the little wood where, in the lusty spring-time, sung to by loud thrush-voices, they had sat side by side, on a primrose couch, and innocently talked.

The day is cloudy and there is a good deal of wind; not a summer wind, softly frolicsome, but with a tart touch of autumn in its breath. It is blowing all the leaves inside out, and coldly showing their whitish under-sides. Joan shivers. She has no inner warmth to make up for the outside chilliness. Her limbs draw themselves languidly one after the other: all the spring seems to have gone out of her young body.

The battle is over, indeed, and the victory won, but the victor's joy is not yet hers. The day after the battle is often a greater trial of nerve than the battle itself. The long strain of effort is ended; the painful, high excitement is cold and dead. The blood that ran so hotly tingling along her veins creeps sluggish and slow; the heart that pulsed with such an agony of speed and energy beats low and faint. She has fought, and she has conquered; and for this she is humbly aware that she is thankful. But it is rather a knowledge stored in the background of her heart than a feeling of any activity or life. To-day all the chords of her being are vibrating to another touch.

Her whole tired soul and unstrung body are crying out in the human creature's bitter yearning for personal happiness; in that heart-hunger which is

stayed sometimes by hope, but which, even in farthest old age, is never quite extinguished — to be only twenty-three, and in all the possible, nay, probable, long years ahead to have nothing but pale resignation, hard self-sacrifice, long, cold endeavor to look forward to. Peer and gaze as she may into the gray, dim future before her, she knows that she will see it lit by no glimmer of warm household hearth; by no shining of husband's smile, or children's laughing eyes.

Alone, alone, alone, to the very end, which makes us all equal, seeing that in death we are every one alone. And if her own prospect is so unsmiling, neither can she draw any solace from the consideration of his. Tears, bitterer than any that her own fate has ever called forth from her, steal now into her eyes as she thinks of him—of his altered look, and feverish gladness; of his empty heart and homeless home; worst of all, thinks—for love in her case is not blind—of his pliant, malleable nature, so easily moulded by the influences that are nearest to him; thinks, too, of what those influences are.

"If he had been of a higher nature," she says to herself in an agony of almost mother-love, so absolutely clean and free from all taint of passion or selfishness is it—"if he had been of a higher nature, stronger, more self-contained, I could have better let him go, since he could have better done without me!"

She has reached the wood now, and is out of the rough wind's reach. She has sat down at a birch-foot, and clasped her hands round her knees while her eyes stray pensively over the woodland pageant round her. It is quite a different show from that which Nature set before her on that her first visit, which to-day brings so vividly back. Then everything was waxing; now everything is waning. There is now no abundant noise of loud music in the air; only once and again a little robin's pipe, wintrily cheerful as if it were his duty, not his pleasure, to sing. Where the primroses opened their young eyes on a strong new world there are only long, limp leaves, sapless and outworn; and where the low violets shook out their perfume, and the ground-ivy spread its little blue carpet, the sorrel and the ragwort, that sadly close the procession of the summer flowers, reign unloved and alone.

Joan's mind is too heavily freighted with its own load to be consciously occupied by a comparison between that day and this; but perhaps, without her knowing it, the changed and sobered scene adds its quota to her weight of sadness. Even the dogs that on that April day galloped and rummaged among the dead leaves and brushwood in such a frenzy of happy bustle, seem now, in their staid maturity, to condemn the resultless chases of their youth. Mr. Brown's venerable form is already curled in slumber. From his hoary nose, snores of a human loudness and frequency have already begun to ascend. Regy and Algy, who during the last day or two have been nourishing some mysterious grievance in their breasts, are now showing their contempt for one another by walking very slowly close round each other with tails curled to the *ne plus ultra* of tightness; stepping very high, and growling.

Joan has closed her eyes, weary with all her late tears. One hand lies nerveless, palm upward in her lap; the other rests on Mr. Brown's head. Her cheek is leaned against the shining white-birch bark; and above her the delicate birch-boughs sway and droop. From the land of waking reverie, dark and clouded, Joan is passing into the fairer domain of dream. What stoutest fighter may not, after the battle is over, lay his head on his knapsack, and sweetly, deeply sleep? But let him be quite sure that it is over. O Joan! you have laid your buckler and your sword too soon aside.

The hottest of your fight has yet to come. I think that Joan never knows in the after-time how long her light doze lasts—that doze so doubtfully hovering

on the debatable land. But suddenly, in one moment, she has sprung into broad wakefulness again, to find herself sitting bolt upright; the dogs at variance, but now united in one vociferous din of angry barking; to find her own heart bounding, as if it would leap away from her body; to find, lastly, one standing over her, death-pallid, statue-still—one from whom five days ago she fled for her life!

"Did you think that you had escaped me?" he says slowly, in a hollow voice, not holding out his hand or offering her any other greeting.

She has drawn herself to her feet. One weak hand grasps the tree-trunk, so late her pillow, for support. Her eyes look steadfastly into the unsteadfast wretchedness of his. In hers there is none of the stunned surprise, the bewildered horror, that had filled them when on that other day he had roughly burst at midnight upon her sad reverie. They are occupied only by an unnamed pain.

"Why have you come?" she says in a voice that is almost compassionate, stern, yet most gentle too.

Under that voice he winces, and a shiver runs over all his body.

"When you look at me like that," he says, shuddering, "when you look at me like that, you make me feel as if I were some unclean creeping thing, that must crawl away out of your sight; but yet—but yet"—stammering and breathing heavily, as one oppressed by some great and ponderous weight—"to-day not even your eyes shall daunt me!—for once I shake off their tyranny!"

He stops suddenly, as if suffocated, and so stands, with dilating nostrils and clinched hands, before her.

"Why have you come?" she repeats, in the same tone of inexorable icy gentleness, still holding him with that austere yet pitying gaze.

"I will tell you," he says, collecting himself with a great effort, and speaking almost in a whisper; "it will not take long in the telling. I have come" (dwelling with slow and heavy emphasis on each word) "here, where I once offered you wealth, honor, love, to offer you to-day poverty, dishonor, but love still, love always, love to the end!—one can give but what one has; this is all I now have to give."

He need no longer complain of the diminution of her eyes; she has slowly dropped them, and has turned away from him with a low groan.

Until to-day it had seemed to her that she has already, in her short life, often and deeply supped of sorrow; but now she knows that till this moment she has but sparsely tasted it. What personal loss, grief, bereavement, could be named in the same breath with the immedicable pain of witnessing, helping, nay, causing this debasement of the beloved? She utters not a word; but no torrent of reproach or invective could give him such a sense of aloofness from her as does that eloquent dumbness.

"Is this all your answer?" he says, unsteadily; "this abhorrent gesture—this stony silence? I tell you"—(with gathering excitement)—"that I cannot bear it!—say, do whatever else you will, but do not dare to set me at this cold, contemptuous distance away from and below you! Do not make me feel as if I were a *murderer!* Joan!—Joan!—Joan!" (with a sudden change of key, spreading out his hands to her, with an exceeding great and bitter cry). "Come to me!—I that in love's name have a right to command!—I that love you, and whom you love—I command you, come to me!"

There was a time when to that summons her whole soul would have gone out in glad and ready acquiescence; but now, if it had been addressed to the dumb ears of one already dead, it could not have met with less answer. Only a quivering of the eyelids, only a slight twitching of the pale, set lips, show that she has heard it.

"You know what my life is," he goes

on, in a rough, low voice, as though afraid that if he paused for one moment, or gave himself any breathing-space, his nerve would fail him; killed by the stony misery of that face of hers; "you have seen with your own eyes—close, so that there can be no mistake about it—that ghastly comedy, that caricature, that I am pleased to call my marriage!"—(with a most bitter sneer)—"you know, as well as I do, that this is a theft that robs no one!—Joan!"—(his voice rising to new heights of woful entreaty)—"I tell you that in all this wide, full world there is not one living soul but you that wants me! Can it be a sin to take what none grudges you?" But still there is neither voice nor movement—only the grave, green forest silence. "Speak!" he cries, maddened by her dumbness, laying his hand heavily on her shoulder, as if to wake her out of sleep; "speak! speak!—you can say nothing for which I have not an answer ready. You can use no words to me that I have not already used to myself beforehand. Speak!—there is no extremity of your anger which I am not prepared to bear the brunt of; but, in the name of all mercy and sanity, let it be an anger that speaks."

Then, indeed, she obeys him.

"Anger!" she repeats, lifting her eyes with difficulty, as if there were some great weight, from the grassy earth at her foot, to the smoke-gray sky, faintly seen between the tossing tree-tops overhead; and speaking very slowly, in a tone of heaviest, heart-wrung anguish. "Anger! does one hurt as I am feel *anger?*"

At the unmeasured sorrow yet meekness of her words, a wave of unspeakable shame and remorse rolls over his stormy soul; but it is too late to go back now.

"You know what my life is," he goes on, desperately; pushing away from his forehead the hair, damp and matted with the cold sweat of that agony. "You have sounded all the depths of its hideous emptiness; have not I read it often in the pity of your face? you know what—but for you—it might have been! honest and just as you are, do you dare to look me in the face and tell me that you owe me no reparation?"

At his words she gives a low cry. Is not this her own thought that is now bodied out in his words? Is not this the doubt that, for a week past, has been giving her fevered nights and troubled wakings? this, that now, dressed as certainty, so blackly fronts? This is her doing, then! It is she that has brought him to this pass. She flings her arms up and clasps her hands with a gesture of uttermost despair.

"It is dark!" she says, stammeringly—"oh! dark! dark! What greater depth of darkness can there be than when Wrong wears Right's face?—right!—wrong!" she repeats, a little wildly; "the one is a word, and the other is a word; and I do not know which is which! but yet—but yet"—(lifting her haggard eyes uncertainly)—"I know that on the other side of this night God's day is shining, though no gleam — none — comes to me here now!"

Her voice dies away in a sob; and, for a while, there is a miserable silence. Then Anthony breaks once again into unsteady speech.

"If you think that it is only a mad, unreflecting rage of mere passion that has brought me here," he says, in a thick, low voice, "you are wrong! I think that any such would fall dead under the rebuke of your eyes! Joan, you were always calling me to rise to the better life; I tell you I cannot! Without you I cannot! I summon you to a task that is worthy of you! Joan, I adjure you, come to me, and show me how to believe again that there are such things as charity, reverence, high-hearted selflessness in the world! In the atmosphere in which I live I am fast growing to disbelieve in the existence of such things! In the name of all justice, all compassion, help me to rebuild my faith!"

As he speaks she turns, and, facing him, fixes him with a steadfast regard. The wildness has gone out of her eyes, they have resumed their look of infinite pity, of meek, unmeasured woe.

"This is my punishment, then," she says, in an intense low voice; "I am fitly chastised for my presumption in thinking that my love for you was of so high and pure a quality that no unclean thing could come nigh it; I would have meddled with the functions of the angels," she says, "and now"—(breaking into an agony of sobbing)—"what basest, vilest among women could have dragged you lower, or sunk you deeper, than I have!"

Again there is a silence, broken only by the slender woodland noises. Anthony has thrown himself on the ground, and suddenly covered his face with his hands, as if to take shelter from that gaze of hers, intolerable else. By-and-by she speaks again: "I did you a wrong," she says, very humbly, in a soft and broken voice—"a great wrong; I see it now; I would have loved you better than other women loved, and instead I loved you worse! I wanted to be kinder to you than any other, and instead I have been crueler than any! I made a mistake, and in my obstinacy and self-opinion I clove to it in the face of all reason and sense; yes, I did you a wrong, and for that"—(her self-command giving way a little)—"I have been asking your pardon on my heart's knees for the last two years and a half! If it makes your pain any easier to know that I suffer too, well, then, I can truly tell you that in all God's armory I think there is no sharper sword than that with which I am today smitten."

At the exceeding gentleness and ruth of her tone he takes courage to drop his shielding hands. It is no longer the upbraiding angel that speaks—it is the woman who loved him and lay in his arms. He lifts his miserable gray eyes haggardly to hers.

"Day and night, day and night, day and night!" he says, with a slow and dragging emphasis; "Joan, have you counted how many days and nights there are in fifty years? We are strong and healthy!—there is no reason why we should not live for fifty years!"

The dark, apathetic despair of his voice makes her own heart sink lead-heavy within her. She sits down on the leafy couch of herbs and moss beside him. In neither attitude nor look is there any smallest shrinking from him.

"It is dark!—dark!" she says, in an awed whisper; then, after a pause, lifting to his her streaming eyes, in which there is yet a ray of purest, tenderest heaven-light—"Anthony!" she says, solemnly, "whether it be ten, or twenty, or fifty years, I think that neither you nor I will be able to bear our lives unless we lay fast hold of the thought that out of our mistakes God builds up his completeness."

There is a long, long silence. Those last high words of hers have tied the young man's tongue, and stemmed the torrent of his agonized, mad pleading. Of what use any longer to stretch out his empty, rash arms to hers? She has soared beyond their reach. In utter dumbness they sit side by side; he has again covered his face with his hands. Only a low groan of extremest pain now and then disturbs the stillness. The green gloom of the wood has grown deeper; the night is gently falling.

By-and-by, with a long, soft sigh, Joan slowly rises to her feet. Her movement rouses her companion from his stupor. For a moment, before she can stop him, he has thrown himself prone before her in the grass.

"Trample me!" he says, in a hoarse, rough voice. "I am not worthy that you should set your dear feet on my neck! Oh, high, pure love!" (lifting his bowed head and his face disfigured and furrowed by tears), "who have ever warmly striven to lift me to your level, forgive me that,

brute-like, following my nature, I have striven to drag you down to mine!"

At his words she stretches out both her hands to him, with a solemn smile of pardon and farewell.

"Love," she says, very sweetly, while, for the last time, her blue eyes wetly dwell on his—"for this once I may call you so, seeing that it is as if I stood by your death-bed—love, you used to tell me that I was your guardian angel—your better self! and of all your tender names there were none that I so dearly loved; perhaps it is a foolish thought, but suffer me to keep them still! Suffer me to think that by-and-by, in the after-time, when life is going hardly with you—when the earth-fogs close around you, and the satyr-voices call you down—that then, perhaps, my face, my voice, which hitherto have brought you nothing but disquiet and woe, may be present with you in memory, as a solace and a sustainment!" Then, without another word, she slowly draws away her hands from his, and, with one solemnest good-by smile, passes away from him into the falling night.

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## POSTSCRIPT.

FRIENDS, are you content thus to leave Joan? Are you willing thus to let the curtain fall over her? If so, read no further. If not, let me by all means lift a corner of it for you; by all means look once again. If, two years later than the incidents related in the last chapter, you had, on one dewy, bright morning of late summer, carefully read your *Times* advertisement-sheet, you would undoubtedly have seen among the deaths this insertion:

"On the 5th instant, at 8 Curzon Street, suddenly, 'of apoplexy,' Lalage, wife of Anthony Wolferstan, late Colonel Grenadier-Guards, aged twenty-eight."

I say no more!

THE END.

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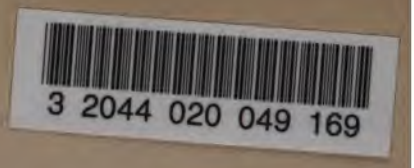


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